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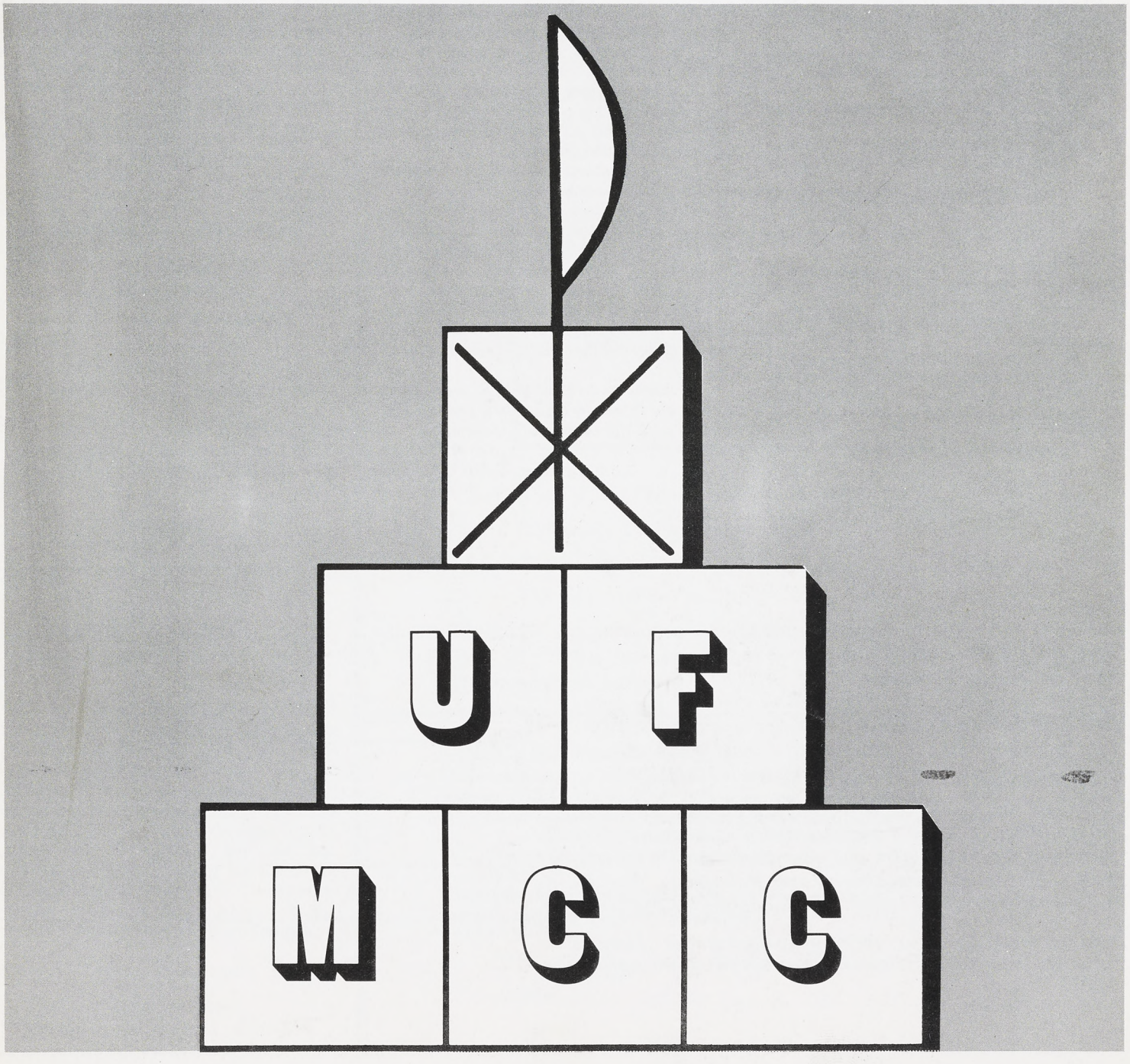
In Unity AND THE GAY CHRISTIAN

NEWS AND OPINION JOURNAL

UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP OF METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES



To The Editor

Dear Editor,

Amnesty International, which won the 1977 Nobel Peace Prize, is encouraging all persons of good will to send a personal letter or post card to:

President Carlos Humberto Romero
Palacio Presidencial
San Salvador, El Salvador
Central America

respectfully requesting the government of El Salvador to:

1) halt the persecution of peasant farmers, and labor and religious leaders in the countryside;

2) abolish torture and arbitrary detention without trial;

3) publish the whereabouts of the over 200 prisoners who have "disappeared" since 1976;

4) end immunity from lawful prosecution for members of the government organization "ORDEN" and security forces who commit murder;

5) observe the human rights guaranteed by international agreements to which El Salvador is bound by international law.

An aerogramme (at the post offfice) costs 22 cents.

For further information on any aspect of Amnesty International's work on El Salvador, please drop a line to El Salvador Campaign, 2112 Broadway, New York, NY, 10023.

Thank you for your concern,

R. Byrd

Dear Editor,

Why did I have to hear about the new directory from gossip? I hope information is published for general consumption, not just for the elite of the church (i.e. clergy, church clerks).

Love,
R.R.

Dear R.R.,

The new directory system you mention is offered through the Church Services Department, which is not my area of responsibility. Accordingly, I have referred your question to the office administrator. Her answer follows.

The Editor

Dear Editor,

I have checked our by-laws carefully, and have found no category of "elite of the church" listed. I refer R.R. to his/her local congregation for the answer to the query.

The Directory of Congregations and Clergy mentioned by R.R. is available from the Church Services Department, UFMCC. It is supplied as a single issue or as an annual subscription with monthly mailings of all pages reflecting changes.

The announcement of this product was mailed to each clergy and to the attention of the Clerk of each local congregation. A part of the duties of the clerk (or secretary) usually include the sending and receiving of correspondence. The clerks and pastors of local congregations have been requested to assist in the distribution of such material by posting it on a bulletin board or by another method selected locally.

It might be helpful if R.R. and others would volunteer to assist their pastors and boards with the sharing of information.

Carol Cureton
Administrator, UFMCC Offices

Dear Editor,

The article on the requirements for the professional ministry in a recent issue of "In Unity" brought to mind another area of vital concern to your readers.

There is rumored to be a similarly repressive move to control the typists of the Fellowship. Why, just the other day, I heard talk of a move to require all typists to learn the use of the typewriter. They may even be forced to memorize where every single key is located if THAT committee has its way. I don't know who they think they are, interfering with a person's spiritual life. If God has called someone to be a typist, who are we to start putting qualifications on it. God can work anyway HE wants to and it's OK by me.

In this Fellowship we've got to start trusting the Holy Spirit a little more. If a person is really right with God and they've been called to be a typist, then God will supply the answers when they sit down to type. Lately I've been practicing this technique, and I think it's urgent that your readers understand it's implications. I saved this part of my last typing testimony to share with your readers:

Amxipty xzopeoanp twouec groolt ta xenomqur roclizio comleith gltoicdjehs.

Now if that doesn't prove it, I don't know what will. If the men and women of the UFMCC don't understand this crucial concept of the leadership of the Holy Spirit, then we've obviously deserted our vision.

Sincerely,
R.W.

Dear R.W.:

You leave me speechless!

The Editor

* * * * * * * * * * *

Address your question or comment to:

IN UNITY, EDITOR
5300 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 304
Los Angeles, CA 90029

As we approach General Conference IX, we begin a natural process of re-evaluation. We re-think issues and get back to basics. This issue of IN UNITY is designed to address those basics by highlighting some of the many facets of our Fellowship. In outlining our history, structure and theologies, it attempts to answer the most commonly asked question of all, "Just what is UFMCC?".

Although not meant to be a complete compendium, this issue will hopefully be a useful resource. It is intended for outreach, for newcomers and members, alike — all who wish a better understanding of our Fellowship. For additional copies please refer to the coupon at the right.

Because we're going to reprint only the number of copies ordered, requests for copies must reach us before April 1, 1979.

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UFMCC STRUCTURE

Rev. Lucia Chappelle

The following is a "sketchplanation", showing the parts of the UFMCC and how they operate. It is not intended to completely cover everybody doing everything in every situation, or even to outline every procedure. It's just a brief overview of our current systems and structures.

If it seems dry, that's because it needed to be simple and direct. If it seems confusing or self-contradictory, it's probably an accurate reflection of the state of our systems and structures.

General Conference is the chief ruling body of the Fellowship and is composed of all licensed and ordained ministers, and the lay delegates and official observers of the local congregations. (Study Groups are represented by one official observer, but have no vote.)

Board of Elders carries on the Fellowship's administrative affairs between meetings of the General Conference. The Elders 1) establish, oversee, and make appointments to the Fellowship boards, commissions, and committees, 2) carry out the directives of the General Conference, 3) have the power to collect and disburse funds for the church's advancement, and 4) preside over the General Conference.

Boards, Commissions, and Committees have been divided into three groups for explanation in this article. The A-group includes those boards, commissions, and committees that are entirely appointed by the Board of Elders and function under the Elder's direction within themselves, without any immediate connection with any other Fellowship body. This group includes the Christian Education Commission, the Commission on Christian Social Action (CSA), the Church Hymnody Committee, the Innovative Ministry Commission, the By-laws Committee, and the Financial Committee.

The B-group includes those boards, commissions, and committees 1) whose leaders and/or members are appointed by the Board of Elders, 2) whose leaders appoint other members, and/or 3) who are directly connected to another Fellowship body. These are: the Board of Institutional Ministry (BIM), the Ad-Hoc Committee on Ecumenical Relations (ER), the Board of World Church Extension (WCE), the Board of Trustees of Samaritan Theological Institute (STI), the Commission on Faith, Fellowship, and Order (FFO), and the Ministerial Credentials and Affairs Committee (MCAC) and District Review Committees (DRC).

BIM: The Director, appointed by the Elders, appoints area representatives on the recommendation of the pastor, interim pastor, or worship co-ordinator, or Board or Interim Board of Directors. The Director appoints institutional chaplains on the recommendation of the senior pastor and District Coordinator.

ER: The Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson has been appointed by the Board of Elders to chair an ad hoc committee on ecumenical relations. The Rev. Wilson appoints members to assist her as she sees fit.

WCE: The Elders appoint an Elder to serve as Executive Secretary, a position currently held by the Rev. Elder Freda Smith. The other members of this Board are the District Coordinators of Australasia and Canada, and the Church Extension Officer for the United Kingdom and Western Europe. This Board's primary concern is the UFMCC's outreach into other countries.

STI: A Board of Trustees is appointed by the Elders to administrate the affairs of Samaritan Theological Institute.

FFO: The chairperson and members are appointed by the Board of Elders. They solicit associate members to serve on the Commission's Task Forces and to provide district and congregation-level contact with the Commission.

MCAC/DRC: The Ministerial Credeintials and Affairs Committee consists of ministers (preferably ordained) appointed by the Elders. In accordance with the procedures established by the MCAC, the Elders also appoint members to the District Review Committees to evaluate applications for licensing and ordination.

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DIRECTORY OF THE UFMCC BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, AND COMMITTEES

BOARD OF INSTITUTIONAL MINISTRY
Rev. Bob Arthur, Director, USA
5300 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 304
Los Angeles, CA, 90029

BOARD OF INSTITUTIONAL MINISTRY (CANADA)
Rev. Lloyd Greenway, Director
POB 6945, Station D
Calgary, ALB T2P 2G2, Canada

BOARD OF INSTITUTIONAL MINISTRY (AUSTRALIA)
Mr. Gerry Smith, Director
47 Mountjoy St.
Petrie Terrace, QLD 4000, Australia

BOARD OF WORLD CHURCH EXTENSION
Rev. Elder Freda Smith, Exec. Secty.
Post Office Box 5282
Sacramento, CA, 95817

COMMISSION ON FAITH, FELLOWSHIP AND ORDER
Rev. William Taylor, Chairperson
3417 Alvarado, NE
Albuquerque, NM 87110

COMMISSION ON GOVERNMENT STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS
Mr. Al Smithson, Chairperson
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San Diego, CA, 92103

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ACTION
Mr. R. Adam DeBaugh, Chairperson
110 Maryland Ave., NE, Suite 210
Washington, D.C., 20002

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
Rev. Jefferson Bishop, Chairperson
5300 Santa Monica Blvd. Suite 304
Los Angeles, CA, 90029

MINISTERIAL CREDENTIALS AND AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
Rev. Jim N. Dykes, Chairperson
1076 Guerrero Street
San Francisco, CA, 94110

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GENERAL CONFERENCE
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B–GROUP
C–GROUP
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DRC
FFO
STI trustees
STI
WCE exec'y
Co-ord. Aus-As. Canada U.K. W.Eur.
E.R. chair
Members
BIM dir.
Chaplains
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KEY
→ selected by
◇ recieves reports from
□ under the authority of
○ comprised of
X must come from
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MISSION
Int. Pastor
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Delegate
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Lay Rep
CLC chair
Rep & Alt.
NOM COM
Min. Rep
Lay Rep
STUDY GROUP
W. C.
Interim Bd. of Dirs
Observer

"A Welcome to (Not) All Persons"

by Gregor W. Pinney

Every Sunday morning, one of the largest churches in Minnesota proclaims "A Welcome To All Persons." It is a sincere slogan, but it has become an impossible one because it ultimately threatens the church members' deepest ideas of Christianity.

The slogan is printed on the weekly bulletin of the Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church in Minneapolis. But the same slogan and the same conflicting values could exist in any church in any denomination. Hennepin Church is an imposing institution, with its congregation of more than three thousand members and its massive Gothic building whose slender spire towers over the treetops on Minneapolis' Lowry Hill.

Lowry Hill, however, is known for more than Hennepin Church. It is known also as the home of the largest gay community in the Twin Cities area. Hundreds of gays live there. Maybe thousands. But very few of those gays ever come to Hennepin Church. It is as if a great chasm had opened in the ground at the edge of the church property and separated the church from its neighbors.

How could such a chasm exist at Hennepin, a cosmopolitan church that truly believes it welcomes all people? Hadn't Hennepin's liberal credentials been established beyond question 20 years ago when it took in the entire congregation of a small, nearby black church? This riddle puzzled the Social Concerns Commission, a group of 10 or 15 people at Hennepin who like to think of themselves as the church's social conscience. So, the commission set out in the summer of 1972 to see how much of a chasm existed and how it could be bridged. I proposed the project and became chairman of a five member task force.

We probably did not need a study to tell us what we were going to find out, but we did need some way of convincing the power structure of the church that we were serious. A painstaking study was just the thing. Besides, we were going through one of our periodic identity crises ("We keep having meetings, but are we accomplishing anything?"), and we needed something to justify our existence.

Our congregation probably had some secret gay members, but naturally we did not know who they were. And certainly there were no openly gay persons at Hennepin. So we had to go outside the church to find some gays to talk with us about religion.

Gregor Pinney is the education writer for the *Minneapolis Tribune*.

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The first place we looked was Gay House, a neighborhood social service agency. Trying to conceal our trepidations, we walked up to the front door one hot evening in July and asked if we could interview some of the men and women who happened to be sitting around the living room. They agreed and indeed were eager to talk with us. Many seemed genuinely interested in religion. They had grown up in devout churchgoing families of Methodists, Catholics, Episcopalians. But now they felt rejected. None of them had been kicked out of any Church but they felt unwanted nevertheless because Churches stood for the idea that homosexuality was a sin. They found that judgment too much to bear.

"There's a general tendency to equate the Church with God," said one young man who lived in an apartment near the church. "And in view of what the Church's past position has been with gays, a good share of gay people feel cut off from God."

Cut off from God. Had we Church people committed such a crime? I couldn't believe it — not at that point.

Justified or not, these people felt separated from organized religion. So, next we went to the establishment — our own staff of ministers and the leading laity of our church — to see how much resistance lay ahead if we tried to close the gap.

Not much, it seemed. None of the ministers or laypersons showed any open hostility of gays. None said keep them out. And to varying degrees, they all seemed willing to accept gays as individuals and Christians. But still, they were not eager to take any definite steps. We should not "single out" gays, they said. We should not invite them "as gays." It would be better to reach out to everyone instead.

And somewhere back in their minds was a belief that homosexuality was wrong, or maybe the practice was wrong, if not the condition, not necessarily a sin, but still, somehow wrong.

That did not stop us because we believed that, in the end, the desire to welcome would triumph. We failed to comprehend how deeply our church people believed in their authority to judge others. But those ideas were not in conflict yet, and we went ahead because no one was stopping us. Our task force drafted its final report in 1975, and the Social Concerns Commission adopted it unanimously.

Things began to fall apart quickly, however. We took our plan to the staff ministers, and over a meat pie luncheon one day at the church, we got a taste of how little progress we had made. According to our plan, the Social Concerns Committee would look for gays who wanted a

church home but did not have one. We would try to find something at Hennepin to interest them.

"But why do we have to make a special appeal to the gays?" asked the associate pastor. "Nobody's keeping them out."

It was a beguiling argument which we had heard the beginning. The fact that we still were hearing it nearly three years later meant that we had failed to prove that a problem really existed. We had failed to prove that it takes more than just an open door to welcome alienated people.

There were other reasons for caution, too, as the business manager explained at the luncheon: "This church depends heavily on the support of a few prominent families. If they should be offended by this thing about gays, the church would be hurt financially."

Two members of the staff, nevertheless, volunteered to work with us, and we moved ahead. By early 1976, we had drafted a set of letters to gay organizations and counselors, figuring they might know of gay persons who were looking for a church home. But we hit a snag when the two ministers working with us declined to sign the letters because they specified that we were looking for gays. So *they* rewrote the letters, purging them of all mention of gays and making them look like nothing more than an ordinary membership campaign.

No one ever responded to the letters. The chasm is difficult to cross, and gays must be told directly that they are wanted. It is not enough to welcome "all persons" because gays know that "all persons" usually leaves them out.

We did not have much time to agonize over the letter episode, however, because another pot was brewing and soon would boil over and ruin our project before we could make any further progress. The other pot was the Metropolitan Community Church of the Twin Cities, a small congregation composed mostly of gays. The MCC had been meeting at an out-of-the-way Quaker Church building for its Sunday afternoon worship services but now sought a more central location. So, the MCC people came to our ministerial staff and asked to rent a small chapel at the rear of Hennepin's building.

A harmless request, it seemed. Hennepin routinely rents its building to secular groups. Surely it would not refuse a group of Christians who wanted to gather in the name of the Lord! But it did. All the ministers, except one, came out against the MCC request.

"The United Methodist Church does not affirm homosexuality as an authentic lifestyle," said the senior pastor in a mimeographed statement. And the MCC's use of our building "would inevitably be construed as an affirmation of the appropriateness of homosexuality."

The Social Concerns Commission had watched all of this from the sidelines, but we decided to get involved at that point and take the MCC request to the top lay governing body, the Administrative Board. For nearly four years we had managed to confine the gay issue to subdued discussion, but now it had all come out into the open. A major debate preceded the board's decision on Sept. 14, 1976, during which it became clear we had touched nerves we had not known existed.

"The chapel is not just space; it's consecrated space," said one woman. "My daughters were baptized there; my husband was buried from that chapel, and I don't want it defiled by *these* people."

One man declared, "It's been made clear from the time of Sodom that it (homosexuality) is against the law of God."

But they were not willing to let God make His own judgments. They had decided what was right and wrong for themselves as well as others, and they felt the institution of the Church must back up those individual judgments.

"We do make judgments," said the senior pastor. "We've judged segregation wrong; we also judge homosexuality wrong." It cannot be proclaimed as right in our church, he said, because "It's contrary to the disposition of the congregation."

"THE CHAPEL IS NOT JUST SPACE; IT'S CONSERATED SPACE," SAID ONE WOMAN. "MY DAUGHTERS WERE BAPTIZED THERE; MY HUSBAND WAS BURIED FROM THAT CHAPEL, AND I DON'T WANT IT DEFILED BY *THESE* PEOPLE."

The chairperson of the Administrative Board put homosexuality into the same bag of sins as adultery and concluded that, with either one, "If we sidestep judgment and refuse to give guidance, we're failing as a Church."

They made no distinctions between human actions that hurt other people -- like stealing and discriminating and committing adultery -- and matters of no choice -- like homosexuality. They did not actually say that gays have chosen to be gay, but they held gays accountable for their condition nevertheless.

"If they'd just shut up, they could go to any church," asserted one woman. "I'd rather not know what their sexuality is," said another.

Keep sex a secret, they said. But hasn't the Church itself raised the issue by saying that homosexual practice is wrong? And hasn't the Church itself promoted sex constantly, albeit the family-oriented hetero kind? It all seemed inconsistent.

Those were the voices of the majority. But the minority also spoke.

The chairperson of the Adult Studies Commission, and his fiancee wrote and produced a play that cut to the core. It portrayed Christ rebuking a Hennepin churchgoer for failing to recognize God's purposes in all of us, even in a young gay man. The individual, who played the young gay man, said later, during the debate, "So long as I feel they don't have any choice (about being gay) then I must extend my love to them. If it is no choice, then the last ten thousand years have been full of discrimination."

One gentleman, who held one of the highest lay positions in the church as chairman of the Council on Ministries, took the microphone and spoke "partly to clear my conscience" for his own acquiescence to racial discrimination when he lived in the South. Referring to what he had heard in the debate at Hennepin, he said, "The intolerance, bigotry and unwillingness to learn about homosexuality rivaled anything I witnessed in the Deep South in the 1950s and 1960s. We welcome all persons, but we single out one group and say it's incompatible with Christianity. That judgment should be left to God."

One woman said, "I think we should ask what Jesus would have done. I think he would have allowed it (use

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A Song Without Music

UFMCC Statement Of Faith

Rev. Bob Wolfe
Pastor, MCC Vancouver, Canada

Ours is a spiritual fellowship. We are a disparate people bringing together a vast and rich variety of cultural and religious backgrounds and an even vaster and more varied reservoir of personal faith. Certainly we all confess ourselves to be of the Christian faith, but is that to say that we are all of one and the same faith? Yes, we would seem to be saying this in the UFMCC, but the history of the universal church, and of its doctrinal and theological development, would shout: no. Wars have been fought, fellowships have been broken, careers have been destroyed,

WE BELIEVE IN ONE TRIUNE GOD, OF ONE SUBSTANCE, IN THE PERSONS OF THE CREATOR, THE REDEEMER, AND THE SUSTAINING SPIRIT, OMNIPOTENT, OMNIPRESENT AND OMNISCIENT, GOD BEING THE CREATOR OF ALL, THE PRIME MOVER AND SPIRIT OF THE UNIVERSE.

souls have been lost, all in the process of interpreting that same Christian faith. What hope have we to maintain our fellowship in the face of such tradition, such history? Are we faced with a future of doctrinal hairsplitting and the attendant fellowship splitting?

No I do not think we necessarily are, as tempting as it may seem from time to time for some of us to want to see our views validated by universal acceptance. I have come to see that our safety as a Fellowship, our strength, lies not in the sexual orientation shared by the majority of us, not in the novelty of being both gay and Christian, not in our common assent to a rule of government, and not in a homogenized faith. It lies in what we have in common, our "official doctrine" as set forth in our By-Laws, and generally known as the Statement, or Articles, of Faith.

During the past year or so, once again conducting Affirmation Classes (the required instruction for new members, a "chore" which not long ago in Toronto I was happily turning over to an associate pastor or an exhorter), I have enjoyed a renewed acquaintance with the Statement.

WE BELIEVE THE BIBLE IS THE DIVINELY INSPIRED WORD OF GOD, SHOWING FORTH GOD TO EVERY PERSON THROUGH THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS, AND FINALLY, COMPLETELY AND ULTIMATELY ON EARTH IN THE BEING OF JESUS CHRIST.

Perhaps it has been the challenges a pastor faces over a period of time — the questioning and the search for one's own faith, all wrapped up in the gamut of human defenses that come to us from parishioners. What has happened is that "going over the Articles of Faith" has become a strong and valuable tool for teaching and demonstrating the gospel message. In talking about it, I can get almost lyrical at times, for the Statement has become for me like a song, a song without music, a hymn of the Holy Spirit, a psalm of reconciliation.

WE BELIEVE THAT JESUS, THE CHRIST, HISTORICALLY RECORDED AS LIVING SOME 2000 YEARS BEFORE THIS WRITING, IS GOD'S SON, FULLY DIVINE AND FULLY HUMAN, AND THAT BY TOTAL SUBSERVIENCE TO GOD, HAS DEMONSTRATED ONCE AND FOREVER THAT ALL PEOPLE ARE LIKEWISE CHILDREN OF GOD, BEING SPIRITUALLY MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE.

It is a Statement of Faith, yet it does not define our faith, but describes what it is that you and I have in common. In its broad strokes and silences it leaps over centuries of controversy to say: this is what describes a Christian's faith, this is the bed rock from which our personal faith springs, this is how we recognize our unity. The great theological controversies, those things about which apparently good Christians have debated — I could suggest a list of them, but supply your own, lest I seem to show bias — just do not appear. They are in the silences, as if the Statement were saying to us that since apparently good Christians have debated these things in good conscience and in faith for so long, they are obviously not what is descriptive or normative of Christian faith.

These silences, noticed particularly when we bring our own individual beliefs into confrontation with the Statement, work in two ways. Not only do they embrace the holders of the various points of view, but they also protect us from one another, from the doctrinal wars that go on even today; for I cannot say to you, or you to me, or the two of us togehter to a third person: go away, be separated, you do not believe as I do. Have we not all, at one time or another, stood before our congregations to publicly affirm that which we hold in common?

WE BELIEVE THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD MAKING KNOWN GOD'S LOVE AND INTEREST TO ALL PEOPLE. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD, AVAILABLE TO AND WORKING THROUGH ALL WHO ARE WILLING TO PLACE THEIR WELFARE IN GOD'S KEEPING.

We have in common our trinitarian understanding of God, for our doctrine says "We believe in one triune God, of one substance, in the Persons of Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit". This is what describes us, describes who we are, but makes no demands on us. Missing are any traces of the elaborative theologies that have been inspired by those simple words as individual men and women of great faith have tried to put them into forms and concepts, symbols and systems, which, for them, enhance incorporating the basic truth into their lives. We do not deny these theologies, nor do we espouse any one of them, because as a Fellowship we embrace them all.

And we hold the Book in common as the measure of our faith, for together we affirm that "the Bible is the divinely inspired word of God, showing forth God. . " Just how God worked out the mechanics, whether through

plenary verbal inspiration or through inspired literary composition, is one of those areas over which good people have debated, and, in some circles today, it is still one of the loudest subjects of contention. But we are agreed that

**WE BELIEVE THAT EVERY PERSON IS JUSTIFIED TO GOD BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.*

it is God's book, it is inspired, and it does show forth God to all people, liberals and conservatives alike. Our common faith recognizes that fact and holds forth the premise that we're not going to fight about that thorny problem which can ultimately be answered in individual hearts and minds by faith. We are, each one of us, free to pursue our faith in accordance with those answers to which we are brought - in this we are protected, and we must not interfere or be interfered with.

Libraries of Christology are contained in the barely six lines of Article Three. The anxious fundamentalist Christian wants more to be said, but what is there to be said that is not already there? What sacrifice is not included in the words "total subservience"? What of preexistence is not included in "the most divine son"? What hope of redemption, of the Kingdom, is missing from the expression "likewise children of God"?

**WE BELIEVE THAT WE ARE SAVED FROM LONELINESS, DESPAIR AND DEGRADATION THROUGH GOD'S GIFT OF GRACE, AS WAS DECLARED BY OUR MASTER. SUCH GRACE IS NOT EARNED, BUT IS A PURE GIFT FROM A GOD OF PURE LOVE. WE FURTHER COMMEND THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE FAITHFUL TO A LIFE OF PRAYER: TO SEEK GENUINE FORGIVENESS FOR UNKIND, THOUGHTLESS, AND UNLOVING ACTS; AND TO A COMMITTED LIFE OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE.*

So also would the "demythologized" liberal love to have more clarification of the statement. But what awe-less, wonderless theology this side of Unitarianism can fail to see itself reflected in the progression "most divine son", "son of man born of woman", "total subservience to God", "children of God"?

I refer, of course, to the parameters of mainstream Christian thought. The shadings between the two are infinite, creating a rich and vast wardrobe of ways to clothe the basic truth of Christ, christian faith, and our salvation. But in our Statement of Faith, the truth is there, leaving it for you and me to clothe that truth, to cast it in words and images that we can handle, and learn from, according to our individual traditions, psychologies, senses of art and drama, and our own spirits.

What is this, some mamby-pamby religion that tries to avoid real issues and to become all things to all people at any cost? I have heard people say that of us, and I can well imagine many more who probably have or will, some of whom are even our own members who secretly guard "the truth" and live in hopes of converting the rest of us some day.

"The Holy Spirit is God, available to and working through all who are willing to place their welfare in God's keeping." "Every person is justified by Grace to God through faith in Jesus Christ." Whoever places their welfare in God's keeping and confesses faith in Jesus Christ belongs, and fits within the unity of our fellowship. We can share with one another in our gatherings and our witness what those expressions mean to us, and how we can best express them in the words and thoughts of our own learning and experience. It is illustrative to me that the first century christian pentecost saw the Holy Spirit as entering into each individual in the room. The experience was not exclusive to Peter, James, and John, the leadership, it was not perceived as a single sheet of flame covering the whole assemblage, the whole church. No, EACH was filled with the Spirit, and EACH responded in his or her own language, according to his or her own custom. Can we do anything other than set forth the truth of Christ as we have received it, and then allow those who receive it from us to respond in the language or symbols which can touch their hearts and lift up their lives?

No, this certainly is no mamby-pamby religion, no deceit of religion cleverly worded to ensnare the largest number into a semblance of faith. We say of ourselves that we are a people who believe that Jesus Christ, Son of God has demonstrated once and for all, by his total subservience to God, that we are the Children of God. And having said that, we are open to relate fully and equally, as he did, with any other person who will confess the same. We face our future together, placing our total trust in the Holy Spirit, in God. Our Statement of Faith is not a web of power and control, not a filter to keep out the undesireable, or a sieve to allow us to sort out the good from the bad; it is more like wide-open arms welcoming everyone. More than a statement of faith, it is an act of faith, maybe even faith itself.

We, in the Fellowship, are yet human, and as such we are open to human feelings and actions that can lead to friction among us -- tf periods of overemphasis in one direction or another, to urges to legislate and create new law, to temptation to judge our way out of uncertainty as we confront problems of ecclesiastical organization, or espousal of the social gospel through our actions, or even delving into the depths of our understanding of the revelation. We run the risk of my communicating to you that this is the right way, the only way, of understanding the Statement of Faith, when, indeed, it is only my way. We are vulnerable in that these things, but for the Holy Spirit, could lead us into wars, the breaking of fellowship, the losing of souls.

**WE BELIEVE THE CHURCH SERVES TO BRING ALL PEOPLE TO GOD THROUGH CHRIST. TO THIS END, IT SHALL ARRANGE FOR REGULAR SERVICES OF WORSHIP, PRAYER, INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES, AND EDIFICATION THROUGH THE TEACHING AND PREACHING OF THE WORD.*

Our Statement, describing who we are and not who we must be, by its very nature, its openness, its inclusiveness, places us squarely and knowingly in total dependence upon God, upon Christ's revelation, upon the Holy Spirit. It is not a weak, diffusive theology, it is a strong affirmation of the truth revealed in Jesus Christ. It is strong in saying that we will live, identify with, and be one with, any other persons who are willing to affirm the same statement, regardless of the shadings of personal interpretations. It is strong in that it is a vision of Christ's words: "Come unto me, all you who labor".

It is a song, a martial, stirring song, a song of inspiration, a song of love and faith. But, where most songs are but words dependent on their music to make them touch our hearts and our lives, this song comes alive through another music, the Holy Spirit. And to that kind of music we can all sing together as one people. †

** Adapted from the UFMCC statement of Doctrine, Sacraments and Rites as included in the UFMCC By-laws.*

Is The Church Sexist ?

Perhaps you saw the "Roots" miniseries on TV. As someone who loves this country deeply, I find it's pretty painful to be reminded of what "Christian America" is capable of doing. That part of our history hurts so much that when I was a kid in school, you never heard about it. In our pride and love for our country, we whitewashed its legacy of violence and racism. Lately, though, we've learned that love is not deepened by willful ignorance of painful truth. We grow when we acknowledge our own past and learn from it.

So it may be that the greatest patriot is the one who maintains a kind of love/hate relationship with his/her country. I mean by that the ability and the courage to look critically at something or someone you love. Even my lover has faults! My country is sometimes seriously at fault. And it's that way with my faith. My own faith-tradition hasn't always been as concerned about justice and truth as it pretends. There are some things about our own Christian-Judaic history that they never taught us in Sunday School. It isn't fun, but I ask you to hang on while we face some truth about sexism in the Church.

Here is a story that I think illustrates what I mean. In 1836, Sarah and Angelina Grimke toured New England speak against slavery. And the Council of Congregational Ministers of Massachusetts issued a statement attacking them: "The power of a woman is her dependency flowing from the consciousness of that weakness which God has given her for her protection . . . When she assumes the place and tone of a man as a public reformer, her character becomes unnatural."

Now, it's fairly easy to see where a lot of American Christians got the idea that slavery was OK. It says so in the Bible. But there's an even greater bias than racism that afflicted those good New England liberals, nobly embarked on a campaign to end slavery. And it's even easier to see where that bias came from. It's in the Bible, too.

More indisputably strong than its approval of slavery is the Bible's sexism. And that always disturbs me, and makes me uncomfortable. It contributes to the love/hate relationship I have with this book. It's the reason an increasing number of women and men have left the Judeo-Christian faith.

I've given this the title, "Is the Church Sexist? Is the Pope Catholic?" Of course we all know that the Pope is Catholic. Yet, there are some who doubt it. There is a fringe group in Hartford called the "Faithful and True Roman Catholics" ("Blue Berets" for short), and they believe that Pope John Paul is not Catholic at all. They are convinced that the real Pope has been kidnapped by vampires, and that poor John Paul is the Antichrist.

And some people don't see anything sexist about the Church.

But no longer can we close our eyes to the evidence. As we learn the findings of modern research into our own Judaic-Christian history, we must be at least a little horrified. I cannot help believe that as God has watched all this, watched the way (s)he has been characterized, it must grieve God. It must hurt and insult the Heart of God.

Usually, when someone wants to defend sexism, or its natural extension, homophobia, they turn right to the creation stories in Genesis, to prove that any deviation from the divinely-ordained supremacy of the masculine is unnatural. And sure enough, those stories put women and sex right in their places, and they've stayed there ever since.

The creation stories as we know them were written after the violent conquest of Canaan, but you can't understand those stories without recalling that conquest.

The Bible admits that Canaan was already inhabited by an advanced civilization when the Hebrew tribes approached the area from the Sinai desert. Despite the fact that someone already lived there, we read of the intention of the arriving tribes to settle there, and to purposely and violently destroy the existing religion and replace it with their own.

The ruling Hebrew group, called Levites, ordered the murder of the inhabitants. Everyone, children included, murdered. At Ai alone, the Bible puts the body count at 12,000. Joshua 10 concludes: "So Joshua massacred the population of the whole region — the hill country, the Negeb, the Shepelah, the watersheds. He left no survivor."

We now know the reason the Hebrew tribes killed all those people and tried to destroy their religion. Their offense, other than inhabiting the land the tribes wanted? The inhabitants of Canaan believed that God was a woman.

For as many as 25,000 years before the invasions led by Joshua, most of the world believed that God was a Goddess. Most of her priests were women, too. In fact, women enjoyed a privileged place in ancient society, usually ruling government, and business.

WHENEVER WE SAY THAT GOD IS NOT MOTHER BUT FATHER, OR NOT FATHER BUT MOTHER, WE BOX GOD INTO THE FUNNY COMPARTMENTS OF OUR MINDS.

During the period of the Levite conquest, tribes of new, male-dominated cultures invaded country after country, proclaiming, as you might expect, that God was male, and replacing matriarchy with patriarchy. You might say that a second phase of world history had begun — the era of masculine domination.

And so, the Levites offered their own account of creation. Their version of creation in Genesis was not original, exactly. Their stories were simply reworked versions of older stories. But their new version claimed that male supremacy was not a new idea, but had been divinely decreed by their male God, at the dawn of time. Every hint of the feminity of God was wrenched out of the stories.

God makes man in his image, and he makes woman out of man to serve man, and punishes woman with pain at childbirth for allowing herself to be led astray by the serpent.

One of the most common symbols of God among those who believed God to be female was the serpent, or snake. The ancient priestesses used snakes the way some modernday artists and writers use drugs. To those immunized against the poison, what happens after a snakebite or a drink of snake broth can be compared to the results

of ingesting mescaline or peyote or certain kinds of brownies. You start to see visions or go into ecstasies. So the snake was believed to be the way God made revelations to her priestesses. You see it now? What this Genesis story is doing is blaming sin on women misled by snakes, a direct attack on the female-oriented religion.

And because sex was one of the temple practices used to worship the Goddess, the Genesis story also associates sex with the moral weakness of the woman, and puts it in a negative light. It's been held there ever since.

And we've never quite recovered from the new status the Levites assigned to women. Property. The property of men.

Something must have happened, you say. Because here we all are and all this kind of makes us sick. We don't want to believe it. If that's what Joshua and the Levite priests were doing, we don't really want to cheer them on. We shudder. So, apparently, Christians don't like to think of themselves as people who believe in male supremacy or in violent conquest. Something has happened along the way to change our thinking.

Something DID happen. Always there are individuals who stand against the collective fury, touching the core of things, and attesting to the unity of all that is. It takes a prophet to know that, beyond all the gods and goddesses, and all the names of the Holy known to people, is the One Unseen Reality, One God. Neither the masculine nor the feminine is supreme. All of life is one.

In the first century of our era, Jesus arrived on the scene, and he died in the crush between the dying age dominated by the exclusive masculine God, and the new age he brought, the age of androgynous wholeness and balance. In his death, the opposites of life and death come together, reconciled by the power of the Eternal Love that created all of us and fully embraces every one of us. In his life, the so-called masculine qualities of bold strength and clear thought are joined with the so-called feminine qualities of nurturing, caring, and receptive sensitivity (to people and to the Spirit).

In the light of Christ's salvation we can learn the healing truth of androgyny — that the opposites of life are really one. The Apostle Paul had a great flash of insight after years of meditation in solitude. He said, and he sensed the Spirit of God speaking it through him, in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither male nor female, there is neither slave nor free, for you are all one in Christ." Sometimes Paul forgot his own words, but we must not forget.

And we must remember the courage of Jesus, who proclaimed the truth about the God of love that welcomes everyone. And we must have some courage. It won't do to say that things are better now and we shouldn't make such a fuss. If things are better, it's because somebody, somewhere, had some courage. What Jesus said was not popular with everyone. He dared to be critical of his own tradition. Jesus knew God too well to go on saying what everyone else was saying about God. We must learn his courage. We must believe that God is really speaking through this church. Speaking the truth that God is not just a God of maleness, but a God whose being includes male and female, straight and gay, black and white, and every condition known to people.

All right, you say, all that is probably true, but the past is behind us, and we're good Christians, so why push this sexism business? Especially this language bit. Who cares? You're only going to make people uncomfortable. People aren't used to it. Our society, after all, accepts words like "he-man-mankind" in the generic sense to mean all people.

IN LIGHT OF CHRIST'S SALVATION WE CAN LEARN THE HEALING TRUTH OF ANDROGYNY — THAT THE OPPOSITES OF LIFE ARE REALLY ONE.

Well, I don't believe it for a minute. I recall a Northeast District Conference in Boston, held at Fanuel Hall, the cradle of liberty. As the Rev. Marge Ragona, our Pastor in Providence, RI, preached at our conference service, my eyes were drawn upward to the huge painting hung behind her which depicts the same chamber, two centuries earlier. There, on the floor of Fanuel Hall, are all the men, with their certain inalienable rights, debating the freedom of all mankind, while the women sat submissively in the balconies and listened. So much for the generic meaning of "all men". It's always meant just what it says.

Yes, it hurts to hear some of our history. Well, then, what are we to do about it? Return to a matriarchal society? Declare that God is really Mother and not Father? Get rid of male priests? To do that would only continue the error of the past.

The truth that has now begun to dawn is that the heart and center of all life, the living God, is a heart of love who draws all of life's fractured parts into one whole. We cannot ever fully understand the fullness of God, and any human relationship, such as Father, Sister, Mother, or Friend, is only a hint or shadow of the Reality beyond the words. Any human analogy, or all of them together, is inadequate to describe the greatness of the God of all life.

Whenever we say that God is not Mother but Father, or not Father but instead Mother, we limit God, box God into the funny compartments of our minds. Yes, there was truth in what those conquering tribes knew about God the Father. But they should not have suppressed the truth that 25,000 years of human history knew about God as Mother. Not just femininity and not just masculinity, but both sides now reconciled into one whole.

In 1976, the seventh General Conference of our MCC churches in Washington mandated by unanimous vote that all of our churches cease the use of sexist language. That was truly significant. Still, we must not be deluded after we have done that — getting rid of sexist ideas and habits is harder. But we must. Because no woman is more oppressed than the feminine side of a man in a sexist society.

The vision in us grows. God has made himself/herself/Godself known to us as the God who, in human flesh, shares EVERY PART of our humanity. Society, history, and tradition have all labeled certain parts of you "mas-

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Is The Pope Catholic ?

Rev. F. Jay Deacon

The Bottom Line

t. earlye scott

The response from last month's article was so overwhelming that the editor of *IN UNITY* begged me to write another. If you believe that one, I've got a great little church building for sale in Florida.

I hadn't planned on talking about the closet again but it's certainly been on my mind and I do identify with it. There must be lots of us. Maybe even the person you work next to!

Recently one of my favorite students, who stops by my room on the average of five times a day, was talking with me and we were having this heavy conversation. We were discussing laundromats.

The dialogue, as it were, went something like this. "*But, you can't have much laundry, Ms.____, since there's only one of you,*" she said. I grinned. "*What I mean,*" she stammered, "*Is you, ah, you don't have a family or anything to wash for,*" she nervously added. I sheepishly grinned. She turned red. Maybe it's one of those you-should-have-been-there situations in order to really appreciate the exchange. I'll call this student Michelle, probably because that's her name. I have a feeling that some day Michelle may be reading *IN UNITY.* Hint, Hint.

Michelle is interested in the things I do, and she has asked me a thousand questions, putting the information together to form conclusions about my life. She basically assumes that I live alone. . .and do laundry for one. But, by my evasiveness, I try to let her know there is more to it. There certainly is more to it. Laundry for two!

Students are not the only people interested in my life.

A hall monitor said, "*What you should do is find a nice rich man to marry--one who travels a lot.*" I wasn't sure why I should pick someone who travels a lot. The ironic thing is, I did just that. What I mean is I picked someone who travels a lot. I reply, "*I don't want to be married.*" I lie.

Another happy homemaker predicts, "*You wait. Some day Mr. Right will come into your life and you'll want to settle down and have babies.*" I gently and carefully explain that I don't want babies or a Mr. Right. They insist, "*You'll change your mind when you meet that special someone.*" What do I know, never having met Mr. Right! Shall I tell her my deep dark secret—that I have met that special someone and that I have settled down? Not wise. I continue to eat my sloppy joe.

This technique is called, "*hide the spouse.*" I have her so closeted that most people are even ignorant of the fact that I have a "*roommate.*" Curious as people are, I'm sure if they knew, they'd also inquire as to what she did for a living. "*Oh, so you live with a minister. How nice. What Church?*" HORRORS, "*Um, it's a small, ah, very small, little ecumenical, Christian church choke--you've probably never heard of it!*" (I hope.) Add another subject to be avoided. Church and God are also in the closet.

Mondays are the real test of skill around here. "*So, did you have a nice weekend?*" I'm asked during my coffee break. This one is easy. "*Yes, and yours?*" I then ask numerous questions suddenly becoming fascinated with the story I'm being told about their three-year-old who stuffed beans up her nose. The toughest question to handle is "*What did you do this weekend?*" Too direct. I prefer the vague ones like, "*Do anything interesting this weekend?*" "*Nope,*" I respond my lower lip protruding a bit sadly. This way they don't pursue that line of questioning. I also like, "*How was your weekend?*" I lightly respond, "*Fine. What did you do?*" When they are finished, I conveniently remember that I have papers to grade.

Getting back to the direct, "*What did you do this weekend?*" trap. I thought you'd never ask. My lover and I had an intimate candlelight lobster dinner. After a leisurely cup of cappuccino, we dressed in our best blue jeans to go boogie. We found a tiny, tacky gay bar in the ghetto where we danced the night away. I don't mind telling you the women were gorgeous. There was this one that was really. . .(sorry, got carried away) We naturally slept in late Saturday. We bathed together. (I wasn't supposed to write that--sorry honey.) Then, all warm and smooth we fooled around awhile, bathed, fooled around, bathed, fooled around. . .we sure were clean. That night we went to a party where we played pin the pasties on the pin-up's whatever. Much like pin the tail on the donkey but much more sophisticated, and grown up. Topped the night off by going snipe hunting with friends. Home again we were able to share some quiet time together in light conversation. Sunday brunch was lovely and so was the bath. We also shared a spiritual time at church taking communion as a couple. We ended the evening having coffee with friends.

"*Oh, not much--what did you do?*" I dreamily reply. They of course fill me in while I smile and nod. I find myself doing that a lot lately.

There are times when I actually enjoy this sport of cover-up because I feel like sticking my tongue out at them and screaming brat-like, "*Nananana nana, I know something you don't!*"

Still, in their eyes, I'm the typical, lonely, old-maid school teacher who lives a quiet, dull, boring life.

MY LIFE IS A LIFE. †

THE GAY CHRISTIAN

A journal of theological reflection from Metropolitan Community Church

THE VEIL OF THE TEMPLE

"HERE, AT THE DEATH OF JESUS THAT BARRIER IS DESTROYED, IT IS TORN IN TWO FROM TOP TO BOTTOM AND THERE IS NO LONGER ANY SEPARATION BETWEEN THE PLACES OF THE HOLY AND THE COMMON PLACES OF THE PEOPLE."

Larry J. Uhrig

BEGINNING, AS WE ARE, in the space where we are, caught in a contemporary matrix of political realities, economic severity, and the general impoverished condition of our energies; it is difficult for one to define religious experience, or indeed articulate any awareness of the Holy. Steeped in Western Rationalism as we are, we have relegated the Holy to a religious category, a geographical exclusion from our common life. We have so efficiently created a separation between the holy, the sacred, and the profane that it has become a matter of fanaticism to keep these two worlds apart.

We hope here to reverse this process, to give equal energy to creating a unity between the sacred and the profane. Our methodology will be simply to look at life, the world, and our experience of it. This phenomenological approach should dispel the popular illusion that there is a separation between what is Holy and what is profane.

To a person of the twentieth century, it has become untenable to just announce a doctrine of God or to simply adopt a theistic world view from one's parents or one's society.

Knowing that we stand in the midst of Western Christian historical tradition, let us choose to put all of that aside and look again at life without believing in anything other than life itself. Let us look at what comes to us from our real experience of life.

It is our experience of life, and therefore grounds for our believing, that the observation of life produces clear awarenesses that there exist dimensions within life that are other than the sum of our experience and beyond the boundaries of that experience.

Throughout our own experience and within the record of the experience of other societies, both primitive and profound, there exists clear evidence of the experience (both personal and corporate) of dimensions of the non-rational, feeling of creatureliness, dependence, the awareness of otherness.

To be human is to experience life as contradiction, as energy, as overwhelming. Placed within social structure or left alone in primitive simplicity, a person intrinsically experiences that which is beyond, that force or power that drives the energies of life to create, expand, reverence, and celebrate.

The point we wish to establish here is that apart from being given a theistic world view or having adopted one, that such a perspective arises out of life itself as intrinsically there. Here let us establish a structure in which to examine the category of this sacredness. It is important at this point to clarify the use of the pronoun *we* or *us*. It is my intention to address *all* of human experience, to interpret what is truth for all persons. Therefore, I intend your participation in this continuing experience. Your experience of the content of this process is itself the validation of this process.

The philosophical foundation of the process rests upon the classic work of the German philosophical

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theologian Rudolf Otto. Writing in the early 1920s, Otto produced what has become one of the singularly most important works in the study of religious experience. His book *The Idea of the Holy* defines and interprets religious experience. Otto's phenomenological approach to life is also our approach: what we know and believe can ultimately be based upon only that which we observe and experience.

Otto defines the experience of the sacred or the holy, as an awareness of creature feeling, of dependence. Such an awareness comes to us from outside of the rational world, from what we shall call non-rational as opposed to irrational.

That which we experience at the base of life and beyond life is defined by Otto as an encounter with the "Mysterium Tremendum." In an encounter with this mystery, the "numen," Otto identifies three elements of experience: 1. The Element of Awefulness, 2. The Element of Overpoweringness and Unapproachability, and 3. The Element of Energy or Urgency. (a, p.30)

Encounter with the Holy, the "numen," produces a response within the creature, a response of awe, of the threat of dissolution, of the source of energy. The creature is at once fascinated by this mystery and terrified by it.

Moses on Mount Sinai and Isaiah's temple vision give literary expression to the experience of the "Mysterium Tremendum." The boar's head in William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* becomes the symbol of the mystery, the holy, that which terrifies and compels the choir boys. Otto says of the experience, "These two qualities, the daunting and the fascinating, now combine in a strange harmony of contrasts, and the resultant dual character of the numinous consciousness, to which the entire religious development bears witness, is at once the strangest and most noteworthy pheonmenon in the whole history of religion." (a, p.8)

Any attempt to examine or explain the phenomenon of religious development must rest upon an understanding and experience of the awareness of the Holy or the sacred. Understanding what is experienced in our present histories begins here and is not by necessity correlated with specific doctrine or traditions.

This three-fold experience of the mystery rests at the base of all religious experience and then proceeds to become "permeated and saturated with elements signifying rationality, purpose, personality, and morality," (a, p. 113) becoming then the embryonic development of religious systems and structures.

The study of anthropology has given us evidence that primitive human society had encountered such awareness of otherness, and / or sacred forces in their experience of life. The stones of Stonehenge, England and the pyramids of Egypt like the Obelisk in *2001, A Space Odyssey,* mark the place of reverence, a space which touches the holy, communes with all that is beyond.

We must now make the following definitive statement: it is primary to our understanding of creation to assert that all human movement, work, and action began as a religious response to the awareness of the presence of the Holy in life.

The history of human experience is found in the unity with the holy, the breakup of that unity and the consequent restoration of unity, with its consequent breakup, and continuing in this flow into the present experience. The eschatological hope of all religious development is the achievement of a unity which is permanent.

Let us continue to look at the physical world, the visible record of human experience embodied in the creative acts of individuals, the Arts.

Gerardus Van der Leeuw, a Dutch theologian and phenomenologist, in his book *Sacred and Profane Beauty, the Holy in Art*[b], has given us a great tool with which to see the response of human kind to the presence of the Holy, the Sacred, the Divine. Van der Leeuw, using Otto's definition of the Holy as the Mysterium Tremendum, proceeds to discuss the classical Arts as the visible and concrete response of humankind to the encounter with the Holy.

DANCE — To the movements of the earth, the movement of the elements, wind, fire and water, the primitive human offers countermovement in response to the mystery of the world. The first moment of humankind is a responsive countermovement to the elements of the universe, to the awe and fear of the mystery. It is like mime between the creator and the creature, a holy and a sacred dance addressed to the mystery. Here is unity with the mystery. The dissolution of this unity comes only later when persons address this movement to other persons and other powers. When movement becomes a response to the other creature rather than to creator, the breakup of unity occurs.

WORDS — The word which is first spoken is the word addressed to the mystery, is the response to the presence of the sacred. The first word is an act of praise, is a prayer address in presence of the mystery, it is human responsiveness to that which is wholly other and beyond.

In a contemporary world so flooded with words both spoken and written, it is only a matter of faith to accept this assertion that the word is at first sacred. From this primal unity again proceeds a breakup of unity as the word is addressed to the creature rather than the creator, becomes a means to an end rather than a simple response to the Holy.

PICTORIAL ARTS — Moving into a more concrete medium we can see more clearly the primal unity between creator and creature. Looking at primitive cave drawing from many diverse human cultures we see clearly the representation of the presenc e of the holy, the sacred, in human experience. The image of that which communicated the sacred was itself communicated through the pictorial arts, thereby continuing the experience of the holy.

THE GAY CHRISTIAN

Here we find perhaps the most enduring unity between the sacred and the potentially profane. (Let us here assert that all is sacred until there is a breakup of unity. When the act of the creature ceases to be a response to the creator, life becomes profane.)

From the earliest, most primitive cave drawing to the great Flemish masters we find the visible unity of creator and creature as the medium of pictorial art captures the image of that which communicates the experience of the Holy.

ARCHITECTURE — The House of God and the House of Humans. Here again we shall see the persistence of unity into our present experience. Looking again at our earlier example of Stonehenge, England and the Great Pyramids of Egypt we can see Holy space defined.

Where humankind encounters the presence of the mystery there is consecrated a space, a house, if you will, for God. The Holy has been defined and set apart as revealed and present in trees and in mountains, in bodies of water and parcels of earth. Here the creature has marked the space and named the experience in the raising of towers, the building of walls.

The first energies of human society were in response to the presence of the Holy. These energies went to protect and preserve the experience of the Holy. The place of the experience of the mystery became the focal point of society and government. Institutions themselves sought to become extensions of the place of the experience of the Holy, seeking to transmit that experience.

MUSIC — Here we have the unbridled experience of the Spirit and urgent power of the mystery harnessed in sound. The first music was a hymn, a song, a psalm of praise to the creator. Here again endure the elements of unity as human experience continues to address the Holy, the mystery in hymn and songs addressed to truth, to beauty and to love.

It is indeed true that one could choose not to view the classic arts as a primary response of the creature to the creator and yet there is the choice to do so. Even here in the choice we see the continuing possibility for unity or for the breakup of unity.

Beauty is for us the visibility of that unity between the creator and the creature. It is also found in the magnificent implication that there is so much more in life which is not visible.

In looking at the human response to the Mystery we need not define the mystery in Christian terms, and we are at once free to do so. Each person is free to define the mystery or show forth the experience of the mystery using the symbols of each one's particular religious tradition.

There is a further implication in Van der Leeuw's methodology which I wish not for us to overlook. Growing out of Rudolf Otto's definition of the experience of the Holy and Gerardus Van der Leeuw's application of that definition to looking at the creative acts of humankind, there is an implied ethic of creation. Let us look at this ethic of creation derived from looking at the process of movement from unity to the breakup of unity and back again. It is apparent that throughout all of creation and history there occurs a unity between the Holy Creator and the dependent creature. This unity is visible in part in the creature's response to the experience of the Holy, i.e., the arts. Paralleling this unity is the dissolution or breakup of unity.

The implied ethic of creation as seen here is found in the response to the Creator. When the response to the Creator, the experience of the mystery, is addressed to the Creator and seeks to communicate the content of the experience — revelation — there is produced what we shall call *responsible creation*.

On the other hand, when the response of the creature is intended to further the ends of or establish authority for the creature, there is produced what we shall call *irresponsible ornamentation.* Every response of the creature which seeks to communicate the content of the experience of the mystery or to make that experience available to the other creature is a responsible response, whether addressed to Creator or another creature. Any response proceeding from a different intention is irresponsible.

The consequences of this ethic are indeed serious. Whereas the responsible creative act further enables the creature to experience the Holy and the mystery, the irresponsible act may indeed establish barriers to our corporate and individual experience of the Holy.

This need not cause us fear, for we began with the assertion that we could not avoid the encounter with the Holy, if we but looked openly at life.

This entire process is still fraught with problems as it continues to be difficult for us to define an experience of the Holy and once defined to relate that experience to our life.

With the definition of the mystery, the Holy, as given us by Rudolf Otto and with its expession in the creative acts of persons as explored by Gerardus Van der Leeuw and with our implied ethic, let us look at our contemporary problem.

The problem, as we define it, is this: How do Gay Christians living in the twentieth century in a context of sexular, profane Western rationalism, articulate our clear experience of the pervasiveness of the Holy through all of life?

Why do we refer to Western rationalism as secular and profane? Western rationalism is both secular and profane in that it does not seek understanding or experience of the category of the Holy. The Holy has been relegated to the world of religion which has itself been segregated from the "reasonable rational" structure of Western civilization.

Since the sexual phenomenon of being homosexual also finds itself outside of the mainstream or formal structure of this Western rationalism, one who is both religious and homosexual is therefore truly alien from this phenomenon of Western rationalism.

Structured religious societies

themselves present a further conflict to one who views life itself to be permeated by the Holy. The source of this conflict comes in the experience of the reality that religious societies agree with the larger cultural phenomenon which sees the Holy as being contained and expressed within religious spheres alone. Religious societies seem to welcome this exclusive domain of the Holy and use this position as a lever of judgement against the secular world; all the while profaning the Holy by their refusal to see its expression in the secular world.

The point we are defining here is that there exists no intrinsic separation between the sacred, the Holy and the secular and profane. Life itself bears the presence of Holiness. The words sacred and profane are only labels upon what we see. The judgement falls upon us if we choose not to see the presence of the Holy; to experience the Mysterium Tremendum in every experience of life.

The purity of this religious experience is confused as an individual point of view becomes submerged in a social and religious context which seeks to deny the validity of such a faith perspective. The context of a religious society such as a congregation of the Metropolitan Community Church reproduces the pervasive religious phenomenon inhibiting Western Christendom. This phenomenon, as alluded to above, is the maintenance of a separation between the sacred and the profane. This context is characterized by individual and corporate obsessions with the creating of moral codes and the perpetuation of limited and restrictive definitions of the nature and name of the Holy. Such pursuits are themselves contributing to the historic pattern of the break-up of unity between the creature and the creator.

The faith perspective which sees unity and Holiness in all of life elicits a deluge of guilt from those individuals who have vested interests in maintaining a limited definition of the Holy and an exclusive access to the presence of the Holy.

In lethal quantity this guilt is transferred to all who would see the pervasive holiness of life and in this demonic transaction we witness the destruction of ministers and the devastation of pastors, teachers, and numerous others who seek to serve the spirit. The problem has been here explicitly presented again and again, and there is no solution to this age-old tension and no resolution to the phenomenon which threatens to undo us.

To find authority in the solution of this conflict let us look again to the arts, and specifically to the art of the word. Through the written word the creature has expressed the experience of that which is Holy and has also given to us guidelines in defining the nature of the Holy as it relates to our total experience of life. Let us now pick up part of our Western Christian tradition which we had earlier laid aside.

Let us choose to use one small piece of written word given to us by a man writing in the First Century by the name of Luke. In the 23rd chapter of his book relating the life of Jesus of Nazareth in the account of the crucifixion Luke records these words, "It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said [my God] into thy hands I commit my spirit! and having said this he breathed his last." (Luke 23:44-46 RSV)

Here is the key to the resolution of this conflict. Here in this verse in Luke's account of the death of Jesus, we find what is for us one of the most powerful statements in Scripture.

Let us look for a moment at this word to us as we have looked at life before. The curtain of the temple was that veil, that separation, that barrier between the place of the Holy and the common places of life. The Holy of Holies was not available for all to experience. The mystery was contained and admittance was the exclusive privilege of the High Priest.

Here at the death of Jesus of Nazareth that barrier is destroyed, it is torn in two from top to bottom, and there is no longer any separation between the place of the Holy and the common places of the people. Access to the presence of the Holy was open to all persons. All places were now Holy.

Here so simply stated as if, in passing, Luke has given us a magnificent revelation of the visible action of the Holy Mystery. The barrier between the sacred and the profane has been destroyed, the separation between the creator and the creature has been abolished and we have no longer a reason to maintain that there should be spaces in life reserved for the holy and other spaces exempt from participation in the Holy.

This is now the affirmation of our response to the Creator: that to live itself is to commune with the Holy, to confront the Mysterium Tremendum, to taste and touch, to see and feel, to hear and to smell, is to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit, the creator and sustainer of life.

We have for so long sought a theology of liberation not seeing that it was ours from the beginning of human experience. It was ours in that first movement, that mime of the spirit's movement, it was ours in that first word addressed to the mystery, it was ours in that first house, the house of God, and it was ours in unbridled music as the song of the creature's spirit meshed with the creator's spirit, and indeed it was ours as so well defined at Calvary and articulated by St. Luke.

The unity between Creator and creature is ours to perceive and share. The only questions left for us to answer are these: why have we not seen this, all this long time in history; not perceived this presence of this mystery; not experienced our liberation; not been free? □

SOURCES

a. Otto, Rudolf, *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford University Press, 1925).

b. Van der Leeuw, Gerardus, *Sacred and Profane Beauty — the Holy in Art* (New York: Holt, Rinehard, and Winston).

FFO

UFMCC's Commission on Faith, Fellowship and Order was formed six years ago to provide a forum for discussion of some of our community's basic questions about faith, theology and biblical interpretation. At the 1975 General Conference, FFO was charged with presenting a paper this year in Washington focussing on six major questions. Since then, District FFO workshops and local churches have studied, discussed, and debated the six questions about MCC's mission and theological task. Here is the Commission's "interim report", adopted by the Conference for study during the current year.

1 What is Theology? How does it relate to the Christ Story?

Every person is a theologian. Every declaration about God is a theological statement — even the denial of God's existence.

Theology is thinking about God and our relationship to God. It is the human attempt to know and describe God. It is reflection on the human experience in relationship with the Ultimate and the Infinite.

Theology says that it is not enough to recite pious phrases and Biblical verses. To do theology is to get at the meaning of these phrases and verses. We have all heard pious phrases like "God bless you" and "God loves you." These are not theological statements per se. A theologian would step in and ask, "What does it mean that God blesses us?" "What does it mean that God loves us?" The Bible states that God raised Jesus from the dead. The job of theology is to take this Biblical affirmation and to answer the question, "What is the importance of God raising Jesus from the dead?" "What is the meaning of this event?" To do theology then is to reflect on the statements of faith. It is using our minds to try to understand and to interpret rather than just repeating a belief, or a pious phrase, or a Biblical verse.

Theology falls into two categories — natural and revealed. Natural theology tells *that* God is; revealed theology tells *who* God is.

Natural theology is that which we can know about God and God's ways through observation of, and reflection upon, the universe. However, there are things about God that we cannot know through observation and reason. They must be revealed to us. This is the basis of revealed theology. We can find out for ourselves that there is a God. It must be shown to us what this God is like and what this God purposes.

Jesus the Christ is God's revelation in history. The God who is revealed in Jesus Christ is the same God who has been revealed from the beginning to the patriarchs and the prophets. This revelation continues for us in the Church which is the living Body of Christ -- the continuation of the incarnation. Therefore, our thinking as Christians about God must be in the context of God's self-disclosure in Jesus the Christ. The unique revelation of God upon which Christianity relies is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That was God revealing God in the clearest possible way.

The historical revelation of God in Jesus Christ is mediated to us through the Holy Scriptures. Our present reflection about God must be consistent with the Jesus proclaimed in the Scriptures.

God's continuing revelation in Christ is known through the people of God. In the Church's Scriptural teaching and preaching of the Christ Story, and in the continuing experience of the Risen Christ through the Church's worship and loving service, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Looked upon in this light, theology is a never-ending task. It is never ended because being a human endeavor it must use human concepts and human

words. The thought structures and language of humans are always changing, and thus theology is always changing. The basic truth and faith behind theology remain the same. The Bible and the historical traditions of the Christian Church remain the same. The theology, however, which interprets these given basics is always evolving and developing. There is change in theology for three reasons. First, we grow in our faith and in our relationship with God. Second, because we progress in our understanding of the given basics; we develop better tools and skills to study the Bible, church history, tradition, etc. Third, because human culture around us is changing, and we must find ways to communicate our faith to other people so that they can understand it. The task of theology is to explain our faith and our message to the people in terms that they can understand. Thus the way theology is done and worded is always changing to accomplish that task.

2 What is the the theological task of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches?

Theology is a human attempt to know and describe God. Through the theological process we study God, God's ways, and God's dealings with humankind. Theology says it is not enough to recite pious phrases, Bible verses, or statements of faith; to do theology is to get at the meaning of these phrases, verses and statements of faith; and their implications for the Church today.

To define the theological task of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches means to state the areas of theological concern MCC should be asking itself and the Christian Church. We must begin by exploring the personal revelation given to Troy Perry and continues now in our corporate fellowship. To adequately approach this, we must remember that a revelation is God's self disclosure to humanity about Him/Herself. The initial revelation was that God does love everyone, including gay men and women; the continuing revelation is that God wills a church to exist in this world to live and proclaim that message.

Our theological task is then, two-fold: (1) to determine the implications of God's universal love for our church's life and ministry; (2) to determine the implications of God's revealing that message through a church composed of worshipping communities constituted primarily of gay Christians. Our theological reflection, however, about MCC as an instrument of God's revelation must be evaluated in the light of God's revelation in Christ Jesus.

Suggested areas of concern to explore are:

(1) *Ecumenism* -- To bind together a group of believers from diverse religious traditions primarily because of sexual identity. MCC is attempting to be an ecumenical fellowship, i.e., to adopt a statement of faith and corporate expression that is both cohesive enough to bind us together into a community of Christians but open enough to allow for individual beliefs.

(2) *Human Sexuality* -- To say that "God accepts everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation," does not adequately explain the relationship between sexuality and a Christ-centered life. Again, the above quote is a pious phrase that needs to be explained, e.g., What does it mean to be accepted by God? What is sexual orientation? Is every sexual act included? If not, what determines which acts are and are not? What does it mean to be sexual? To be Christian? To be both?

(3) *Prophetic Mission* — The message of our fellowship is prophetic in that it may challenge some of the traditional views of the Judeo-Christian heritage.

(4) *Human Liberation* — We often hear from the pulpits of MCC that Christ Jesus is our Liberator. In itself, to say that "Christ Jesus is our Liberator" is not a theological statement but a "pious phrase" on which we need to do theology to find the deepest meaning. To get this meaning we must ask certain questions, e.g., From whom or what does Jesus liberate us? How does Jesus liberate us? Is this liberation only a future event, i.e., "pie in the sky by and by," or does Jesus liberate us now? Is Jesus only concerned with "spiritual" liberation? Does the liberation that Jesus offers have anything to do with the liberation movements, e.g., Black, Latino, Native American, Gay, Feminist, of today? If so, how much and in what ways? Once we begin to answer questions like these, we can then begin to say that we are developing a theology of human liberation, i.e., we are discovering what the deepest implications of what it means to say that Christ Jesus is our Liberator.

3 How do we define the community to which we are called to minister?

Current discussion about the community to which MCC is called to minister has begun to polarize into two identifiable views:

(a) On one view, MCC's community of ministry includes all humanity. Since it is a Christian Church, its missionary efforts and resources must be directed toward all people. There may be no implication of exclusivity in our ministry.

(b) On the other view, the community that MCC is called to serve should be defined as primarily, but not necessarily exclusively, the Gay community. Since many churches are unable or unwilling to faithfully preach the Gospel to Gay people and do not effectively respond to their spiritual and social needs, then Gay persons must have the opportunity to seek their own worshipping communities. Despite noises to the contrary, this definition of community has been the one that most people in MCC have implicitly accepted. They have done so with uneasy conscience, because it appears to be contrary to Scriptural demands. Since Christ's Church is for everyone, then all Christian congregations must re-

flect that all-inclusiveness of their constituency. Thus the problem facing us in responding to this question is the dilemma of apparent Scriptural demands versus sociological reality.

Sociological reality has, in fact, placed persons in community. MCC must, therefore, relate not merely to persons as if isolated, but as *persons-in-community.*

The Church's mission involves the creating and sustaining of community. If by *community* we mean individuals seeking mutual development of God-given potentialities, our task has begun. Always, the Christian community is a beginning, a becoming: never a perfect completion.

Yet we must speak of *community* in a variety of senses, for as we have recognized, persons exist in community. By *community* we mean a central, ministering core group; we may mean a wider Church community of persons whose intensity of involvement is not equal; or we may speak of even wider communities to which we may be called to minister in direct or remote ways. Our very existence is a ministry to the total world community. A recognition of this total family of God's children, in communion with God or estranged, is one meaning of the word "ecumenical."

We may, therefore, speak of *community* as persons related to us in spiritual communion in Christ. We may also speak of persons whose spiritual core we have not heretofore reached, but to whom we may nevertheless minister at other levels. We must never say to any person, "What have we to do with you?" for all the earth's people are related in human community, and all are potential objects of the Church's ministry.

In each response to the question of the definition of MCC's community of ministry, an important theological concept is central:

(a) The first answer chooses the inclusive nature of the Christian Gospel as the decisive theological consideration. If sexual or ethnic minorities and others have been discriminated against elsewhere, this position goes, it must not be so here. MCC must be a model for integration and nondiscrimination.

(b) To the second answer, the central theological concept is the notion of election: a called and chosen people, on the model of the calling of Israel or the establishing of the Church. In both instances a group of people, who for the most part were previously uncommitted to one another in any significant manner, shared a common experience of having their oppression/slavery transformed into liberation by the divine hand. Each community found motivation for common commitment to one another on the basis of their common liberation experience. Each was commanded to keep the relevance and power of the liberation experience alive by reflecting on it, as a *community*, in the format of worship. Similarly, to challenge the theological legitimacy of Gay people forming a worshipping community separate from the wider institutional religious community is to challenge God's wisdom and right to act as S/He will.

These two themes — inclusion and election — now find themselves set in opposition. But the opposition is only the clash of a generally understood idea (inclusion) with one often tragically misunderstood (election). We must examine the latter, for its proper understanding is pivotal to our consideration.

Israel continually struggled with the concept of election. In a positive vein, the prophets proclaimed the purpose of Israel's election to be a "light to the nations." On the other hand, Israel, propelled by a distorted election-consciousness, attempted to exterminate the Caananite people — whom it viewed as rejected and unacceptable before God. Genocide against Jews, Gays, and others has been the consequence of distorted notions of election; an example is the case of Nazi Germany — Hitler only sought to carry out what churches had been preaching for centuries. If a group thinks of itself as specially chosen "insiders," it is likely to become self-righteous and to conclude that the non-elect have no right to exist.

The Christian's model for "election" is Jesus. He understood his calling as a call to servanthood. Jesus was a servant, recognizing the value of every person and every person's potential relatedness to God. Historically, however, the Church, like Israel, has often misunderstood its election. Therefore it has needed prophets to lift up the election model of Jesus the Christ.

The community of faith may be expected to share a common experience, commitment and call. While it must never be exclusionary, it may reflect a sociological commonality. But if it is Christian, it does not exist for itself. The moment it does, it misunderstands election and becomes a threat to every "outsider". Jesus came to include every outsider, every victim of oppression. We must make common cause with all oppressed people, precisely because of our particular call.

We must learn to understand oppression in all of its forms as that which inhibits realizing of one's potential for relatedness to God, the self and the neighbor.

It is likely for the foreseeable future that our congregations may be largely Gay in composition. That is congruent with our call and our beginnings. But also congruent with our call is the fact that we exist for the world. Our very existence is a prophetic witness to the world and the Church.

To seek to serve *only* the "Gay community," however, is not only a misunderstanding of our call; it is also a misunderstanding of our humanity. We must learn to discard our limiting categories for human persons, and recognize that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, straight nor gay.

4 How might we focus or bring to bear the Christian Gospel on the needs of the community we have defined?

The Christian Gospel is the "Good News" that God comes to us in Christ, speaks to us, and acts for us and through us in unconditional love. The Gospel can and must reach into human existence at every point. Because that is our affirmation, we dare to focus and bring to bear the Christian Gospel on the needs of the community we have defined.

First of all, what needs are we speaking of? Certainly not the needs of isolated individuals or an abstract "community," but the needs of individuals-in-community. We might speak of three interrelated needs:

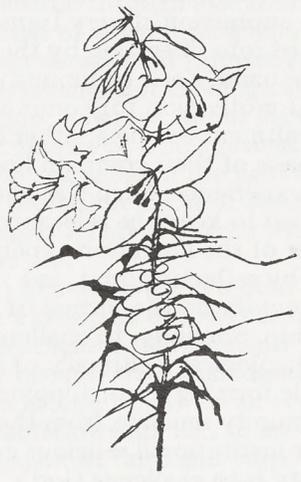
(1) The need to deal with where we have come from — our brokenness, our sin, our pain, our struggles, our fears, failures, hopes and dreams. This is the need for acceptance and healing.

(2) The need to know and decide who we are in relationship to God, to ourselves and others; to experience the dynamic transformation from "no people" to "the people of God"; the need to respond to God's calling us out, recognizing our own uniqueness, and our common createdness.

(3) The need to decide where we are going -- where God is leading us. What is our purpose, our mission? All people need to be challenged to give what only they can give. "We must believe in Destiny, and that it stands in need of us" - Martin Buber, theologian.

How do we focus the Gospel on those needs?

(1) Through *Prophetic Criticism* — Through the Holy Spirit, prophecy notes the "signs of the times" and speaks the truth in love. The task of prophetic criticism is to liberate theology from intellectualism, dogmatism, shallowness and elitism; and we must invite every person to join us in a "grass-roots" (i.e., coming from our own experience), innovative, dynamic, open, Spirit-filled theologizing community. Our method of theologizing is based on the continuous interplay of action and reflection. The data for our concrete theologizing comes from real-life situations, when we come up against brokenness, fear and despair in our brothers and sisters. Prophetic criticism seeks to shatter false idols that keep us from God, such as materialism, dogmatism, and all forms of false security and religiousity.



(2) Through *Prophetic Creativity* — The Gospel clearly states that "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." We might also say "All are oppressed and are in need of God's liberation." All persons must identify and face their own oppression, with the additional realization that when one person is oppressed, all are oppressed. The recognition of our own oppression, in whatever form, affords us the great opportunity to bring the secular and the sacred into a new dynamic relationship. Not that our oppression itself makes us more worthy of God's love; rather, it makes us more receptive to God's love.

We must embrace with a sense of certainty the knowledge that the Spirit is indeed about a "new thing" in our history, and that there is nothing any of us can do to make it happen or to stop it from happening. We can simply listen to the Spirit, who still speaks in the Church, and respond, enriching our lives and those of the community we serve. To do so is to rediscover the power of Pentecost. To fail to do so is to relegate ourselves to irrelevancy. What God is doing in our midst in the freedom and power of the Spirit is the meaning of our lives.

We must therefore:

(1) Structure times, places and resources for reflection on ultimate concerns, and for corporate celebration of the relevance, power and authority of the Gospel to transform lives and peoples; worship, and a flexible, dynamic approach to education must lie at the heart of our ministry.

(2) Structure an environment in which community and personhood may flourish: where people are free to ask, " Where have we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?" where people can experience the process of acceptance, healing, growth, challenge and commitment; where people can realize the free gift of the grace of God-in-Christ, and be challenged to true discipleship.

(3) Assume a stance of advocacy for all oppressed peoples, making clear the connection between gay persons and all persons, between gay oppression and all oppression — and finding in Jesus Christ the chief Advocate of all the earth's peoples.

(4) Honestly explore and develop our understandings of ethics and lifestyle in relationship to the Gospel.

(5) Do the day-in, day-out work of love and caring by reaching out and serving the very complex and pluralistic community around us.

5 How might we reflect or manifest that focusing task in our worship?

(To be developed)

6 What is the unique emphasis of the Christian ministry of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches?

1. Human sexuality has been MCC's point of entry or "door" to our mission. This church came into existence affirming that homosexuality is a valid manifestation of the divine creation of human beings in the image and likeness of God. Thus, sexuality is a gift of God. From the beginning MCC has preached that gay people, along with all people, share the benefits of God's grace.

Jesus taught by his example that human sexuality is to be dealt with in the same way as any other aspect of humanness. In contrast, human beings, ever since the fig leaves of Adam and Eve, have considered sexuality with fear, shame, and awe. Furthermore, they have judged it according to standards which make it stand out as something very separate in human behavior.

Jesus breaks radically with this perception. By his action, sexuality has the name and terror removed from it, and it takes its place as another aspect of humanness to be dealt with and judged with the same objectivity as all other human behavior. Jesus does not place the abuse of sexuality in a special category requiring special condemnation.

One of the explicit Gospel encounters involving sexuality is the confrontation of Jesus with the woman taken in adultery. In this narrative, the threatening power of sexuality is reflected. It shows how the free expression of sexuality was perceived as a threat to the community far out of proportion to its importance. It was so threatening that it needed to be dealt with by ritually sanctioned violence and death.

Jesus handled this situation in the same way he handled all questions of justice and rightness. He said, "Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her." When they all left, Jesus said, "Is there no one left to condemn you? I do not condemn you either . . . go and sin no more." (John 8:1-11)

In this situation Jesus dealt with the laws governing sexual behavior in the same way he handled the question of the observance of the rules of the Sabbath: "The Sabbath was made for human beings, not human beings for the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27)

The unique emphasis of MCC is dealing with human sexuality openly and honestly as Jesus did. Instead of repressing, denying, or hiding sexuality, MCC follows the pattern of Jesus and puts it on a par with other aspects of humanness.

MCC realizes that God fully intended for human beings to be human and sexual and that sexuality should be an integral part of the wholeness of a fully human person.

Thus MCC attempts to de-fuse the tension caused by relegating sexuality to a separate realm. This leaves room for redirecting the energy thus saved into efforts for the responsible use of sexuality, as Jesus did. Thus it is not, "begone sinner," but, "Go, and sin no more."

Putting a lot of energy into suppressing one area of life impedes the liberation of the whole person. There, we consider that de-fusing tension in the area of sexuality will result in release of immense amounts of energy for living a fully Christian life. It will at the same time lead to liberation from the compulsion to establish rigid, legalistic rules and boundaries in other areas such as dogma and morals in general, where aggressive "righteousness" and "judgmentalism" now prevail.

2. Human sexuality has been MCC's point of entry into our mission, but what does our sexuality have to do with our Christianity?

We recognize that sexuality is an essential aspect of our personhood, an aspect that cannot be ignored or separated from the rest of our humanness. By this MCC is emphasizing that we cannot find spiritual, mental, or physical wholeness unless we deal affirmatively with our sexuality.

But, our sexuality is not and should not be the focal point of our lives. An important emphasis of the Christian ministry of MCC is that everything in our life, including our sexuality, must center on our relationship with God through faith in Jesus the Christ. MCC emphasizes that sexuality is part of the whole self which is called into a relationship with God who is the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustaining Spirit.

3. In carrying out its mission, MCC emphasizes the Gospel message in unique ways that bring a new credibility to God for many people who once felt estranged from a "Policeman in the Sky" type of God. MCC emphasizes a God who accepts, a God who cares, a God who makes self-acceptance possible.

This ministry places a unique emphasis on God's love for everyone, for this is a God who does not discriminate — this is a God who first loved us.

This God becomes relevant in the Jesus who related to Samaritans (foreigners), women (who were considered inferior), lepers (social outcasts), sinners (supposedly rejected by God), and other rejected elements of society.

MCC preaches that God loves and accepts all, not "God loves you if . . ." MCC does not put an "if" or a "but" on God's love.

God loves us regardless of what we are or are not. We need to love the uniqueness, difference of others as God loves us, despite, or perhaps because of, our differences. We need, therefore, to love others because of what they are and what they are not. †

THE GAY CHRISTIAN

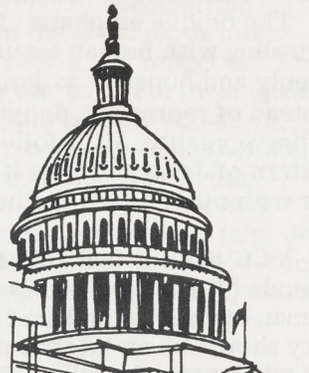
is a journal of theological reflection for the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. Because it is an open forum for thought, the views expressed in this magazine do not necessarily reflect the position of TGC or of the Fellowship. Also, the appearance of a name in this magazine does not denote sexual orientation or affectional preference. Articles and comments are encouraged and should be addressed to: The Rev. F. Jay Deacon, Box 2392, Chicago, IL 60690.

Editor
F. Jay Deacon

In October, 1975, the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches established a Washington Field Office to serve as a major presence for the denomination in the nation's capitol.

From the beginning, Christian Social Action has been emphasized in MCC. Because of the history and make-up of the denomination, MCC's primary thrust in Christian Social Action has been, and must continue to be, a human rights one, especially civil rights for gay people, while at the same time dealing with racism and sexism in whatever form they may appear.

The Washington Office was opened because of the UFMCC's belief that, as Christians, we must educate ourselves in the struggle for justice in the world. This means taking part in the legislative and political arena as well. It is especially important for MCC to stand up and be counted where the oppression of gay women and men is an issue.



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The Washington Office, staffed by Social Action Director, R. Adam DeBaugh and his administrative assistant, Allen Grooms, not only acts as a representative in the U.S. Capiton for the more than 120 Churches of the denomination, but it also provides its services to both MCC members and other people in the gay community and their friends. The office helps to make appointments with members of Congress, keeps track of information on Congresspeople's positions on gay civil rights legislation and other related issues, provides educational materials about current legislation affecting gay people, keeps track of governmental actions which affect human rights, and acts as a referral service for gay people and others interested in aspects of human rights.

The office helps to educate the U.S. Congress about gay people and gay oppression in this country. They also assist in the drafting and publicizing of legislation. Cooperation with other local and national organizations working for gay civil rights is also a part of their function. †

samaritan theological institute

Samaritan Theological Institute is the officially recognized educational institution of the UFMCC. STI is accredited by the Board of Elders of the UFMCC to train students for the professional Christian ministry and to provide continuing educational opportunities for UFMCC clergy and laity. The Institute adheres to traditional Christian doctrines and also recognizes continuing and new revelations of God, of which the birth and ministry of Metropolitan Community Church is an example. STI has made a special effort to be open to women, who are often denied ministerial training in other schools. Gender, sexual orientation, age, race, and nationality are not factors in the admission of students.

STI recognizes its responsibility to offer training for the special needs of MCC's ministry as well as for the broader aspects of the Christian ministry Because of this -- in addition to the traditional courses that most seminaries offer — STI also provides courses that cover sexuality and homosexuality, the contributions of women, and inclusive images of God in the context of the Scriptures and the Christian tradition. The developing theology and ethics, and the polity and programs of the UFMCC are also taught.

The first priority of STI is to offer a full educational program for its resident students in Los Angeles. There are, however, many opportunities for clergy and ministerial students throughout the Fellowship to take advantage of Samaritan training through correspondence courses and through one-day seminars which are offered at various places.

STI confers Bachelor of Theology degrees upon its graduates. The Bachelor of Theology degree is an "exempted" degree, and, like STI credits, is recognized only within the UFMCC. STI is not authorized, approved, or accredited by the state or any regional accrediting body, because it lacks the assets and full-time faculty and staff to qualify for any other state status. †

News Composite

Patrick Townson

In this column, Pat Townson presents short interviews and information of interest to our community. Coverage includes the happenings in the political, social, and religious arenas. Mr. Townson encourages our readers to submit brief summaries and/or clippings, etc. of matters pertinent to our community. Address any correspondence to Mr. Townson at POB 1003, Chicago, IL, 60690.

Remember the TV show a few years ago called "The Week That Was"? Let's adapt that slightly to be the "Month That Was" in this column as we examine the horrors that beset our community and the nation during the month between Thanksgiving and Christmas, 1978.

Ordinarily a time of holiday rejoicing, the final days of 1978 brought anguish and shock to everyone including gays. First came Jonestown, then the Milk/Moscone affair. After a respite of two weeks came news of John Gacy. A resident of the northwest outskirts of Chicago, Gacy stands accused of mass-murder of a proportion equal to the case of Dean Coryll a few years ago in Houston.

Despite the fact that a minute percentage of murders, rapes and other crimes with sexual overtones are committed by gay people, know-nothing newspaper editors continue to play up the homosexuality of Gacy, the bisexuality of Jim Jones, and the sexual orientation of Harvey Milk. As kinky as sexual crime may be, the addition of a homosexual twist makes the case kinkier still.

The *Chicago Tribune*, and other papers on their syndication circuit have chanted "homosexual, homosexual, homosexual" in every edition of every issue for the past few weeks. Never mind that our straight brothers and sisters have hangups too — seldom does the paper report that a "known heterosexual" does anything. But you had better believe that John Gacy has become the best known "known homosexual" in recent times, courtesy of the *Tribune* and others in the press.

FUNNY JOKES THAT AREN'T SO FUNNY

Right after Jonestown first came into full bloom, this writer received a lot of ribbing from brothers and sisters about the Metropolitan Community *Cult*. They asked whether or not we participated in Kool-Aid Communions, or if our pastors forced members of the congregations to engage in heterosexual activities. Needless to say, these comments did not come from people active in the Fellowship, but from gay brothers and sisters who considered themselves very witty. The fact is that sometimes the distinction between Church and Cult is a hard distinction to make.

In countless churches around the country, sermons were preached on drawing that hard, ragged line between Church and Cult. Dave Jackson, author of "Coming Together: All Those Communities, and What They're Up To" (Bethany Fellowship Inc., Minneapolis, MN) makes a successful distinction between the two when he writes, "my criteria is not whether the group is charismatic, has extended family households, a common purse, or lived together in a close geographic proximity, though those characteristics in one form or another are represented frequently.

"What I looked for in preparing this book was whether the believers shared a common life. Have they turned away from an individualistic existence to surrender all that they are and all that they have to Jesus via a local, self conscious expression of his body? I have tried to eliminate cults. . ." This 200 page book is worth reading, and includes a lengthy description of the Reba Place Fellowship, in Evanston, IL, with which Jackson is affiliated.

If I were to separate the cults from the churches I suppose my emphasis would be on the importance to the group of the central theme of salvation through Jesus Christ. What do you readers think? Write me this month with some feedback for future columns.

THAT SEAMLESS ROBE AGAIN

Two columns ago I expressed a belief that the mainliners would continue to rumble among themselves about gay-related issues until a schism became a very real possibility. I do appreciate the comments received on the subject, including the majority opinion among my correspondents which seemed to be that I was a doomsayer or worse. Now the news from the Evanston, IL campus of Northwestern University is that something is going to give somewhere, in the continued strained relationship between that university, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, and the United Methodist Church, from whom all blessings (financial) flow.

A year ago, Garrett dismissed two candidates for the ministry of the UMC on the grounds of their declared homosexuality. This decision by Garrett was based on their stated responsibility to the UMC, their obligation to observe the requirements of the Book of Disciplines (which pointedly puts down openly gay candidates for ordination), and, perhaps most important, according to James Will, a professor at Garrett, was the endangering of funds (around a million dollars worth) that Garrett receives regularly from the UMC.

Trouble is, they seem to be forgetting the ethical points invloved. Following the dismissal of the two students last year, Northwestern University, which awards the degrees to Garrett students, took a cold, hard look at its relationship with the seminary. It would seem that Garrett needs Northwestern a lot more than vice-versa. A faculty committee at NW is now screaming loudly about violations of academic freedom. Issues are being discussed, and solutions to the problem being considered, but the final word is going to have to come from Garrett when they decide which means more to them — Methodist money, or the multitude of resources available from Northwestern. A conference in February will help decide some of the issues involved.

MORE ON LIBERATION

I promised to discuss the importance of radio talk programs in combating the open hostility toward gays in society, but space for this column is almost out, so we will hold the subject until next issue, when the theme will be the use of the air waves to reach gays in lonely places. Mizpah. †

The Fellowship Family

NEWS AND NOTES OF MCC PEOPLE AND EVENTS AROUND THE WORLD

CHRIST CHAPEL MCC RAZED

SANTA ANA, CALIFORNIA

Christ Chapel MCC (Santa Ana, CA) was totally destroyed by fire in the early morning hours of January 24, 1979.

The fire occurred at 1 A.M., just two hours after a threat on Pastor Roger Harrison's life was recorded on the church's telephone answering machine.

Fire department officials have ruled that arson was the cause of the fire. Investigators determined that the fire was set in two places, in the sanctuary and in the pastor's office at the back of the church.

The building, which was owned by Christ Chapel, was built in 1896 as a Jewish synagogue.

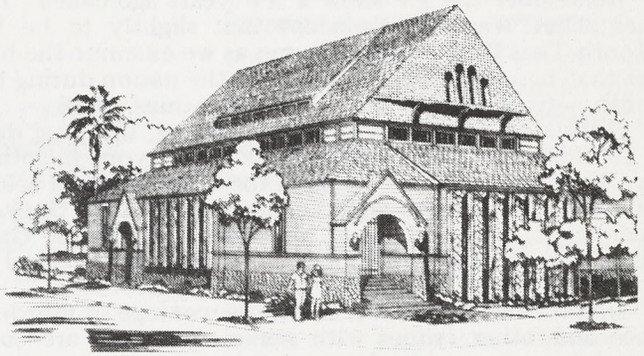
Prior to the fire, the Orange County government was attempting to have the building officially declared an historical site.

Pastor Harrison and the congregation are still in a state of shock over the fire, but are already discussing whether or not to rebuild on the site.

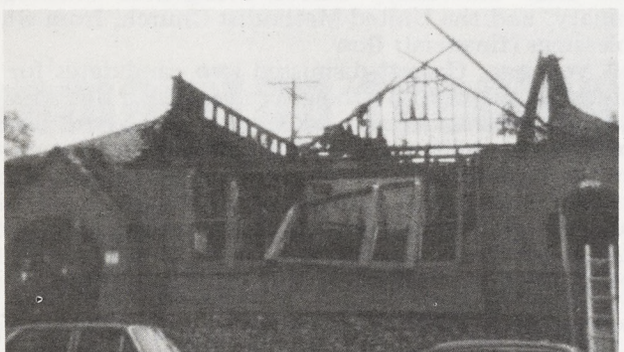
Many congregations have contacted Pastor Harrison to offer support and assistance. MCC Pomona has supplied hymnals, an organ, chairs, and communion plates for Christ Chapel. They also purchased new vestments for the pastors to replace the ones lost in the fire.

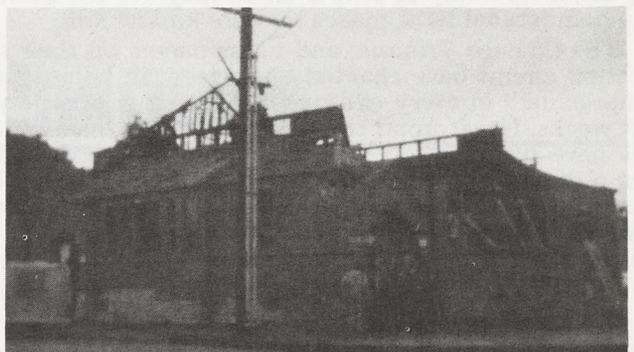
The pastor of an Episcopal Church in Santa Ana offered the group use of their church for worship, but the Vestry (Board of Directors) overruled the pastor and rescinded the offer. The Vestry allegedly feared that allowing the MCC group use of their building could result in their church being firebombed.

Warrants have been issued for the arrest of a suspect, allegedly a dissatisfied frequent attender of Christ Chapel. †



(above) Artist's rendering of Christ Chapel MCC.
(below, left and right) Charred remains of building after fire.





RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

UNIVERSITY'S CHRISTIANS FORM SUPPORT GROUP AS A RESULT OF MCC'S CAMPUS MINISTRY

An organization of gay and lesbian Christians and their friends has been formed at North Carolina State University. The new organization, the Gay and Lesbian Christian Alliance (GLCA) is affiliated with St. John's MCC in Raleigh.

President of GLCA is Todd Ellis, a junior. Faculty advisor is the Rev. Willie White, NCSU campus minister and pastor of St. John's MCC.

Ellis said the new group is designed to "provide fellowship, including emotional support and organized activities among gay and lesbian Christians and their friends." The new organization will also stress the promotion of "feelings of self-acceptance among gay and lesbian students," Ellis said.

In its relations with the larger university community, the GLCA will provide educational programs which will also extend to the general public concerning various aspects of gay personalities and lifestyles, according to the GLCA Constitution.

Ellis also said the GLCA will stress programs and efforts which will "promote an understanding of the relationship between personal sexuality and religious faith." †

GALENA PARK, TEXAS

NEW FREEDOM EVANGELISTIC TEAM TO MAKE ALBUM

The New Freedom Evangelistic Team, directed by the Rev. Ron Anderson, has announced that they will be cutting their first record album while on hiatus in Houston, TX. The albums will be sold for $6 each (with discounts to bookstores), and should be available in early March. The Team requests that persons interested in obtaining copies of the album send them a card or letter indicating how many copies are desired. (Please do not send money at this time — they only want some idea of how many albums to order.)

The Team's bus, "Shasta" has been "retired" after having recently suffered severe mechanical difficulties. The Team, which travels throughout the US conducting spiritual renewal services, has acquired a new bus, currently being remodeled, which will be ready for the Team's return to the field in March.

To contact the Team regarding the album, or to book spiritual renewal services for your church, write:

New Freedom Evangelistic Team
Post Office Box 371
Galena Park, Texas 77547 †

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

MCC-SD PASTOR HONORED

The community of San Diego hosted a testimonial banquet in late December at the U.S. Grant Hotel honoring the Rev. David Farrell, Pastor of MCC San Diego.

The Rev. Farrell was honored for his dedicated efforts in promoting and protecting the human rights and civil liberties of all men and women. The banquet highlighted his efforts in opposing legislation which would infringe on individual human rights and the civil liberties of all people.

The banquet was attended by numerous community leaders and representatives of the religious, academic, and professional communities. †

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

MCC LOUISVILLE DONATES MEMORIAL FUND TO SAMARITAN THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE

The congregation of MCC Louisville (Parish of the Holy Covenant) established a fund in memory of Delores Weedman, a member of the church until her death in October, 1978. The Board of Directors and Co-Pastors Rev. Sandy Taylor and Rev. Anne Keast voted to donate the $120 to the UFMCC's Samaritan Theological Institute.

In a letter to the Rev. Jeffrey Pulling, Dean of STI, the Co-Pastors indicated the reason STI was chosen as the recipient of the fund: "Ms. Weedman's death was tragic as she took her own life. As Pastors, the Board of Directors, and the congregation, we all feel our sister struggled with life as others are doing; our goal to spread the Gospel message and reach those in struggle has become even clearer to all of us. We feel through the efforts of Samaritan individuals are going forth to reach and touch many lives. This Memorial Fund will help others to continue." †

MCC HISPANA CELEBRATES FIVE YEARS OF MINISTRY
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

MCC Hispana recently celebrated its fifth anniversary of ministry within the UFMCC. The mission, pastored by the Rev. Jose L. Mojica, serves the large Hispanic gay community throughout New York's five boroughs. Although most of its members are bilingual, MCC Hispana serves as a warm and friendly haven for persons new to the United States and unfamiliar with the English language, and provides a mission outreach to an ethnic community largely uninvolved in other organizations of gay people.

MCC Hispana is a gathering place for Christians from many Spanish-speaking lands. Its members come from Ecuador, Colombia, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Spain, Mexico, Costa Rica, Peru, and Guatemala.

In addition to face-to-face ministry in New York, Pastor Mojica maintains an active correspondence with gay Christians in several countries.

Pastor Mojica, who was born and raised in Puerto Rico, is the founder of MCC Hispana. He was formerly associated with an Assembly of God church. He studied at the Assembly of God Seminary in Puerto Rico from 1965 to 1968, and served in the U.S. Army from 1969 to 1971. He came out as a gay person on October 31, 1970, and celebrates that day as his gay anniversary.

In November of 1972 he first attended MCC-NY. After attending for several weeks, he spoke with the ministers, the Rev. Howard Wells and the Rev. Roy Birchard, who encouraged him in his sense of calling to serve the Spanish-speaking people. On October 15 1973 he began holding services in Birchard's apartment. On June 6, 1974, the group began using the chapel of Calvary Episcopal Church in Manhattan and have been worshipping there since that time. At first, the group was small, but by February 1976, the congregation was granted mission status within the UFMCC. Since 1977, MCC Hispana has also maintained an office and small-group meeting space on the ninth floor of a large office building at New York's famous Times Square.

At the present time, MCC Hispana is working toward becoming a chartered church in the Fellowship, meaning that Pastor Mojica could serve full time, which would greatly aid his efforts to establish other MCC congregations throughout the Spanish-speaking world. "Right now, we are praying to see what God would have us do," Mojica stated. "There are several individuals with whom I am working in preparation for the ministry. One must see if people have the true calling."

MCC Hispana's task is more difficult than that facing many other MCC congregations because many of its members are young (in some cases, students) and struggling to become established in the United States. Like the waves of immigrants who came before them, these people must struggle for basic survival and find employment in an area of the US with high unemployment. Pastor Mojica's own work in developing other ministerial leadership has been slowed by the limitations of a tent-making ministry.

It is not all hard work, though. Since 1974, Pastor Mojica has been in relationship with Ricardo Zurita, a native of Ecuador whose writing and poetry appear in *Gay Hispano*, the church's newsletter. Like many minister's spouses, Ricardo's influence is important but often unacknowledged.

Group activities of MCC Hispana include a regular weekly Bible Study, prayer meetings, an outreach service in Queens, charismatic services, Sunday School, and fund-raising dances at the Gay Triangle Community Center in New York. This past year, members traveled to Atlantic City, NJ for a joint worship service and social with members of MCC Philadelphia, PA, and the MCC Atlantic City study group.

"This Gospel of liberation should be preached to all people. Let's go to South America to bring Christ to our gay brothers and sisters there," Pastor Mojica commented. †

DON'T FORGET!!!

UFMCC'S NINTH GENERAL CONFERENCE

AUGUST 9 - 13, 1979
BILTMORE HOTEL
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

MCAC ANNOUNCES

MINISTERIAL EXAMS

Rev. Jeffrey Pulling

The MCAC Sub-Committee on Standards met in St. Louis, MO, in January and requested the Rev. Pulling, Dean of Samaritan Theological Institute, to write this article to inform everyone in the UFMCC of the new proficiency examinations required of all candidates for the licensed ministry beginning Spring, 1979.

All persons seeking to become professional ministers within the UFMCC and applying for their initial licenses must first pass certain proficiency examinations. These examinations are in the areas of Bible, Church History/Theology, Practical Theology, and UFMCC Polity. The Standards Sub-Committee of the MCAC has prepared these examinations in consultation with STI, and they will be administered in all districts of the UFMCC in the U.S. and Canada on Friday, March 30, and Saturday, March 31, 1979. The two-day testing period will be monitored by members of the District Review Committee (DRC) in each district. Candidates for the licensed ministry should contact their District Coordinator to find out the two locations in each district where the examinations will be offered.

The fee for the examinations is $10 per person for the entire two days of testing, which will be used to cover duplicating, postage and grading. Checks or money orders should be made payable to Samaritan Theological Institute and must be received prior to taking the examinations. The Standards Sub-Committee has requested that four STI faculty members be the readers for these examinations and grade the examinations pass or fail.

For 1979, two of the proficiency examinations, Church History/Theology and Practical Theology, will be combined, thus there will be three proficiency examinations this spring. Candidates must pass all three examinations before they will be considered by their DRC's for licensing this year. A description of the three exams follows:

BIBLE

The Bible examination will be divided into three parts: an objective test on Bible content (closed book); an exegesis of selected scriptural passages (open book), and sermon construction. The candidate will, of course, use a Bible and is free to bring any textbooks, handbooks, commentaries, and dictionaries (s)he wishes. For 1979, the Old Testament passage to be exegeted will be from the Book of Jeremiah, and the New Testament passage from the Gospel According to John.

In sermon construction, the candidate is expected to use a Bible during the testing period but no other aids, and will select two situations from the list provided, developing sermon outlines for each situation.

CHURCH HISTORY/THEOLOGY/PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

The primary concern is that the candidate be able to use, apply and interpret the Christian faith/tradition/heritage in practical ministry situations. Questions will be essay in nature and will cover counseling, teaching, admin-

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UFMCC Structure *continued from page 4*

The C-group includes those boards, commissions, and committees whose membership is elected by District. They are: the Commsision on Government, Structures, and Systems (GSS), the Committee on Lay Concerns (CLC), and the Nominations Committee (NOMCOM).

GSS: A chairperson for the Government, Structures, and Systems Commission is appointed by the Board of Elders (an exception to the definition of C-group). The rest of the membership is made up of the one lay and one ministerial representative elected by each District Conference, voting in separate houses.

CLC: One representative and one alternate are elected by the lay house of each District to serve on the Committee on Lay Concerns.

NOMCOM: Each District Conference, voting in separate houses, elects one lay and one ministerial representative to the Nominations Committee, which selects suitable candidates for the Board of Elders during General Conference.

All boards, commissions, and committees operate under the direction of the Board of Elders (By-laws V:B2), report to the Elders, and, through them, submit reports to the General Conference.

Districts and District Conferences are established by geographical areas for Christian fellowship and the mutual cooperation of local congregations for their own benefit and for the objectives of the Fellowship as a whole.

District Coordinator (DC) is a licensed or ordained minister elected by the District Conference to 1) moderate all District Conferences, 2) officially represent the Board of Elders in that District, 3) chair the Board of Home Missions, 4) see that every local congregation in the District has a pastor, interim pastor, or worship coordinator, and 5) visit each local congregation in the District.

Board of Home Missions (BHM) is comprised of the pastors of all chartered churches in the District and the District representative to the CLC. The BHM directs the establishment, life and growth of the study groups and missions.

Study Group (SG) is a group of people authorized by the DC and BHM to associate with the Fellowship as a local congregation.

Mission status is granted by the DC, BHM, and Board of Elders, who review the petition of a Study Group certifying that the group has been functioning for at least three months, has at least 25 persons actively involved, and is receiving adequate financial support.

Chartered Church (CC) status is granted by the DC, BHM, and Board of Elders, who review the petition submitted to the DC certifying that the group has had mission status for at least three months, has at least 35 persons actively involved, and is financially able to support a pastor and a full program of activities.

Worship Coordinator (WC) is a lay person or minister appointed by the DC to coordinate the worship of a SG or mission in the absence of an interim pastor, or appointed by the congregation of a chartered church in the event of a pastoral vacancy.

Interim Pastor (IP) is a licensed or ordained minister selected by a mission or chartered church and approved by the DC and BHM as the spiritual leader of a mission or of a chartered church pending the election of a pastor.

Pastor is a licensed or ordained minister elected by a chartered church to perform the duties of teacher, preacher, spiritual leader, counselor, worship coordinator, moderator of the Board of Directors and congregational business meetings, and general overseer of all church activities, committees, organizations, office staff, etc.

Board of Directors consists of five to nine members in

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Lay Concerns

Lay Concerns has taken a new leap into the life of the Fellowship. CLC now has active representatives in eight districts and lay conferences, newsletters, leadership workshops and publications have been the result. One district has put together a "Lay Person's Guide to MCC," which contains the bylaws, an index to the bylaws, information about the Elders as well as a district directory. An actively communicating body, CLC district reps have been exchanging information and materials among themselves, and many have requested the Lay Guide for their own districts, with local sections inserted. Soon a "Lay Page" will become a regular feature of IN UNITY so that the work of the committee can be shared in an open forum. At General Conference VIII each district was requested to elect a district lay representative to the Committee on Lay Concerns. As we work toward our goal of full district participation, the Lay Page will enable all the laity and clergy of the Fellowship to be aware of the ideas and good work happening through the Committee.

The Elders have directed the Committee to "facilitate the flow of information between the laity and the Board of Elders" and CLC has provided each district lay representative with a vehicle for accomplishing this. But the meaning of CLC goes beyond the flow of communication. The very fact that our Fellowship is turning its ear to us marks a new relationship of the laity with the church. It is hoped that by bringing our many resources to the fore, the laity will be able to help strengthen the communications, community, and even the vision of the church. CLC is calling laypeople to maturity as Christians and as members of the church body.

Our place is as partners, not as rivals or overseers or general thorns-in-the-side of the clergy. Our signs of maturity are positive contributions that build up the church family. How this is manifested depends on how each district perceives the tasks and its own needs. Accounts of the contributions being made will be printed on the forthcoming Lay Page.

If your district has not yet elected a member to the Committee on Lay Concerns, consider doing so at your next district conference. If you do have a lay rep, consider attending the Lay Concerns meeting at your next district conference and see what's going on. For further information Ms. Jean Gralley, chairperson of CLC, may be contacted at 5300 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 304, Los Angeles, California 90029.

Structure *continued from page 27*

good standing (including the Pastor) elected by a chartered church to take charge of all matters pertaining to the Articles of Incorporation, finances, property, and physical affairs of the congregation. In the event of a pastoral vacancy, the Board of Directors also serves as a pulpit committee to facilitate the election of a new pastor.

Delegates/Observers are elected by local congregations to represent them at District and General Conferences. Chartered churches elect one delegate per hundred members or portion thereof, missions elect one delegate, and study groups elect one observer, who has voice but no vote.

If you've made it this far, you're probably ready to return to the beginning to try and make some sense of all this. That has nothing to do with how smart you are — it no doubt means that you tried to follow some thread of logic that just ended abruptly. We realize that our structure, etc., needs some work, and some changes will probably happen through General Conference, but this is where we are now, after ten short years.

One of the challenges this Fellowship faces is to pull all the loose threads together in preparation for the next ten years. Give some thought to suggestions you can offer to improve our system, talk it over with your conference delegates. It will help prepare them for when structural issues are introduced to the conference. †

continued from page 4

COMMISSION ON INNOVATIVE MINISTRIES
- Task Force on Chemical Dependency
- Task Force on Aging
- Task Force on Death and Dying
- Task Force on the Handicapped
- Task Force on Counseling
- Task Force on Transgender

Rev. Joan Johnson, Chairperson
2830 Cedar Ave., S., Suite A
Minneapolis, MN, 55407

STANDARDS SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE MCAC
Rev. John Gill, Chairperson
1127 SW 2nd Court
Ft. Lauderdale, FL, 33312

CONCERNS SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE MCAC
Rev. Larry Uhrig, Chairperson
945 "G" St., NW
Washington, D C , 20001

COMMITTEE ON LAY CONCERNS
Ms. Jean Gralley, Chairperson
5300 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 304
Los Angeles, CA, 90029

UFMCC BY-LAWS COMMITTEE
Mr. Herm Mank, Chairperson
1076 Guerrero Street
San Francisco, CA, 94110

COMMITTEE ON ECUMENICAL RELATIONS
Rev. Nancy Wilson, Chairperson
45 East Adams Street
Detroit, MI, 48226

†

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED . . .
remembering UFMCC
in your will?

Welcome *continued from page 9*

of the chapel). By allowing it, we could have some interchange, some interaction."

Indeed, some of the opponents had argued that the two churches should not be separate. Why can't the MCC people simply come to our regular worship services? they asked.

They got their answer from a woman who nearly cried as she took the microphone late in the debate and asked incredulously, "We expect these people to come and be a part of us? How can they, with what we have been hearing tonight? These people are not asking to have an orgy in our church. They are asking to worship God. How can we deny them that?"

We could deny it, and we did — by a vote of 19 in favor and 65 against. That left us wondering where we stood with our Task Force project of reaching out to the gay community. Did we have the support of the church? We asked the Administrative Board and received our answer on Jan. 11, 1977.

"**. . .GAYS MUST BE TOLD DIRECTLY THAT THEY ARE WANTED. IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO WELCOME 'ALL PERSONS' BECAUSE GAYS KNOW THAT 'ALL PERSONS' USUALLY LEAVES THEM OUT"**

This time the crowd was smaller, the tension lower. And our request was much tamer — merely support us for an evangelism project. No one could accuse us this time of fostering a separate church. But other arguments were available.

"I know several homosexuals," said one man. "They never bother me. I don't see any problem if they joined. But I see something different in going out and seeking them. Even though there's probably no harm in it, it may stir up dissension.

One longtime Hennepin member, said, "I don't see how we can tap them on the head and drag them in here. We don't do it for anyone else."

She was right, and that was a big part of the problem. We don't go out actively looking for new members. Our sense of evangelism has become so passive that any aggressive outreach would sound threatening, whether to gays or straights.

"It may be true that there needs to be more vigorous action," the senior pastor allowed. "But we don't want to affirm the homosexual lifestyle."

Our margin of defeat was not so bad this time — something like 17 to 35 — but it was defeat nevertheless. Our project was dead. The Social Concerns Committee met the next evening and officially put the project to rest.

But the gay issue will never rest. It still gnaws at our soul. One night last summer, a gang of vandals defaced the Quaker Church in Minneapolis where the Metropolitan Community Church meets each week. The words "queers" and "fags" were painted on the wall of the church. The incident moved the Methodist Bishop of Minnesota to issue a statement. While he acknowledged that the Methodist Church opposes homosexual practice, he decried the vandalism at the Quaker Church and warned Methodists "not to get caught up in this spirit which is so alien to the love of God."

What the bishop did not mention was that his own church had turned away the MCC when it wanted a new place to worship. Perhaps he did not consider that this act of rejection, like every act of rejection, might also be alien to the love of God.

Our church bulletin still proclaims every Sunday morning, "A Welcome to All Persons." And that is true, in a sense. Gay men and women are free to come if they wish. The door is not barred. But beyond that door lies judgment. It might as well be barred. A welcome with judgment is no welcome. †

Is The Church Sexist? *continued from page 11*

culine" and others "feminine". We men have been taught to despise and suppress anything "feminine" in us. Because if God is male, then maybe male is God, and whatever is feminine in us must be repressed and destroyed just like the people who lived in the cities of Canaan. And women have similarly been assigned narrow, life-constricting roles. Inferior roles. What part of you has been systematically stifled, choked to death?

If we can acknowledge the feminine in God, then we can acknowledge and value the feminine in us. If we can acknowledge the masculine in God, then we can acknowledge and value the masculine in us, too. In Christ, all of our life becomes one, because God is one, and God is greater than any of those divisions that separate us from ourselves and each other. No, not just a return to matriarchy. Not a continuation of patriarchy. Not separatism. Not men and women just reversing roles.

That is not our goal, but a NEW creation in which there are no more roles or divisions. God made both masculine and feminine in God's androgynous image because God is both masculine and feminine. And because we are in God's image, so are we. The challenge is to learn to know and love all of the things that we are, and to strengthen them all, and to bring them into union. That is the meaning of the reconciling cross of Christ.

That means that ALL of us — every part of each of us — is accepted, loved, cherished, made in God's own image, and forever set free to be — in Christ. †

Ministerial Exams *continued from page 26*

istration, and evangelism/outreach (the candidate will be asked to draw up a model plan of evangelism for a local church.

UFMCC POLITY

This will be based upon the current UFMCC By-laws (revised 1977); the book, *The Lord is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay* (the historical portions related to the founding of MCC); and the brochure, "The Universal Fellowship Today." The examination will include objective questions on the By-laws and essay questions on the history and structure of the UFMCC. (A good way to prepare for this examination would be to take the STI correspondence course, "UFMCC Polity", but this is not required. The cost of this course is $40 per person.)

The Standards Sub-Committee consists of the Rev. John Gill, Chairperson (Ft. Lauderdale, FL); the Rev. Roy Birchard (St. Louis, MO); and the Rev. James Glyer (Kansas City, MO). According to the Rev. Gill, "The general intent of the new standards, of which the proficiency examinations are a portion, is to provide the Fellowship with trained, competent, professional clergy for our future growth and ministry." For more detailed information on the exams, write to the Rev. Pulling, Dean of STI, 5300 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 304, LA, CA, 90029. †